

# The Dagger and the Cross

by  
Joseph Hatton



*R. B. Mantell*



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MANTELL AS ROUBILLAC

# THE DAGGER AND THE CROSS

A Romance

BY

JOSEPH HATTON

Author of "By Order of the Czar," "An Exile's Daughter," Etc., Etc



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*The Dagger and the Cross*

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# THE DAGGER AND THE CROSS

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## CHAPTER ONE

### THE MUSIC OF THE SWORD

"THOU knowest, Pisani, I am no swordsman, and if he kill me, then Francesca becomes his prey. The thought of it puts me on the rack."

"Let it rather nerve thy arm, good Signor Roubillac, and I will teach thee how to meet thine enemy," replied the master, who had brought from Toledo the art of Tubal Cain, and not alone the craft to fashion a blade, but how to use it.

"'Tis said he has slain as many rival lovers as he has achieved conquests over women. What he is pleased to call his art of sculpture he uses as opportunity for his amours. His passion of adventure hath its chief excitement in the duello."

"I have heard no less; but there is a trick of play shall win thee rest from his persecution, if thou wilt have as much patience to learn as thou hast to achieve thine own greatness in the arts of peace."

"I will be patient, good Pisani; and if it please thee, we will begin our practice at once."

"What new offense hath he committed that should approve such haste? Hadst thou been ardent in choler as thou art in good deeds, thou shouldst have taken counsel with me long ere this."

"I bow to thy rebuke, 'tis well deserved; and I will confess to thee, more than once, Pisani, it has been in my heart to stab him while he has been off his guard—the Mother of God forgive me! Nay, and it was whispered in my ear, methought, that such would be a righteous deed."

"Love and jealousy need no counsel from the devil, Signor Roubillac, but I would not have thee stain thy soul with dishonor. If 'twere within the compass of possibility that he should give thee just cause to slay him where he stood, unprepared, then no discredit might fall on thee; but the Signora, thy wife, is of too rare a virtue for such likelihood, and 'twere a wrong to her and thee to have her name commingled with so grave a scandal, even as an encounter in her defense. I would advise some other course of quarrel than that which afflicts thee."

"None knows better than thou, Pisani, how beyond suspect hath ever been the woman who, first giving me the opportunity to win an everlasting fame in my Angel of the Ascension, gave me the privilege to be her slave and her protector."

"Nay, that is to put the rights of a husband below the dignity of marriage and thine own

merits, Signor Roubillac; but all Venice, not to mention Verona where she was born, can bear witness to the many and supreme virtues of Francesca Roubillac. And methinks 'twere the wisest thing to let herself be her own defense; Giovanni Ziletto is not the first gallant who has envied thee."

"And so I had resolved, dear friend, and would still continue in that purpose, but that he has developed a strange power over her, which has made his attentions not only an offense but a terror. Whether 'tis the evil eye or whether 'tis by some strange magic, I know not, but to name him even in her hearing seems to invoke a strange power that brings her fearful to my side."

"I once met the evil eye, as 'tis called, in Florence," said the swordsman. "He was a master whose blade was said to whisper and shriek in the combat, with a devilish impulse; but I closed his evil eye, Signor Roubillac. And in Venice, here, in the little garden of the palace of the Duke, and in his gracious presence, I met yet another, gifted 'twas avowed with weird and unholy influences, possessed of a sword that had been hammered into shape at Damascus, and sharpened in an enchanter's cave, and I know not what; but believe me—and thou shouldst know—there is no magic road to excellence, no partnership of the devil, nor any charm known to man that will make a painter without genius and labor, any more than a swordsman can be made without tutorship and

a blade fit for his skill. My master was the famous Swordsman of Seville. Why, thou art half a Spaniard thyself; and so true is Nature, it may be that the impulse of the dagger thou speakest of is a heritage of thy mother's country—for 'twas oftener the knife than the sword they used when I studied in Seville, and an outraged lover did not always deem it necessary to give his enemy an equal chance of life and death when he summoned him to judgment. But we of Venice have a nicer law of morals; or we assume it so, and that is enough for men of honor."

They were singularly opposite in character and appearance, these two friends; the swordsman alert, clean-cut of limb, his party-colored hose and loose open shirt a picturesque note against the more somber gown of the painter.

The power of the afternoon sun was modified by outer shutters; but the lapping of the water without sent a dancing reflection upon the frescoed ceiling, and now and then caught the radiance of Pisani's little armory that decorated the walls of his popular school. Once in a way the usual silence of this particular quarter of the city was broken in upon by the blare of a warlike trumpet above the music of some festal chorus, for the Venetians were fitting out one of their latest expeditions against the Turk, and the sunny air was busy with pronunciamientos thereof. But Pisani and Roubillac found in the happiness of Francesca matter of far greater moment than all the schemes of Doge and Council, and all the messages of trumpets and banners. Pisani

had been her father's friend, and Roubillac was her husband.

While the swordsman was recalling reminiscences of conquests over alleged supernatural powers, that he might thereby strengthen Roubillac's confidence in his advice and forecasts, he was fondling a shining taper blade with a hilt that seemed part of his strong yet pliant wrist. He bent it as a bow, and flicked it forth again. It was almost like a whip to whistle and sing as he played with it.

"Yes, my friend, it sings to me many a glorious song," said Pisani, with a smile that lighted up his sharp features, "and it has memories. Many a time it has spoken to me, as it did when it parried the first thrust of the evil eye; and it has a grim and startling laugh. Nay, Signor Roubillac, every man to his trade. Do not your radiant colors sing to you on your palette? Are there not notes of varying cadence as you range them for your canvas? Methinks your brush made music that was divine when it began the creation of that angel which the people almost worship above the altar of San Stefano, taking her for our beloved Mary herself in some holy masquerade of angelic shape."

He whipped the air with his blade and took no heed of Roubillac's remark that to speak so of his work was to speak profanely. The painter crossed himself, at which Pisani turned an inquiring face to him.

"I did but protest against thy irreverence of the Holy Mother," said Roubillac.

“No irreverence, my freind. Father Castelli was wont to say the Mother of God doth often walk on earth, doing acts of grace in humble guise; but I cry you mercy, if I have—”

“Nay, good Pisani, no offense. I was thinking more of the unworthiness of my own handiwork than what for the moment seemed to be an irreverence on thy part; and I feel the blame of it, when the name of Father Castelli rises to thy lips for a defense of thy religious philosophy.”

“Ah, Signor Roubillac, we miss our dear friend and confessor, the pious Castelli, whose knowledge of the world and man’s natural infirmities made him ever kindly and forgiving. I had the honor of a letter from him, come yesterday was a month.”

“Say’st thou so? And yet he hath never writ to me.”

“’Twas brought me by the hand of a ship’s master, trading to the Levant, and had come overland a great way to the English coast, he said; but there was little of note in it, though he did make inquiries after thee and the Signora, and bade me, if ever I had opportunity, to let him know how it fared with Signor Roubillac.”

“I thank his reverence; but was that all?”

“He did seem to imply that an agent was on his way to Venice, or likely to be anon, with commissions for craftsmen and artists to carry their genius and their tools to England; but if that were so, we should have news in due time.”

“And said he naught of his English home?”

“That ’twas lovely if it had but our Venetian

skies, gay if it had but our Venetian mirth and music, holy if it had but our devotees; a mountain village they call Eyam, set on the side of a hill, with rugged cliffs near by and vast stretches of moorlands; a primitive people; his home, the Old Hall, so-called, and his host and hostess of liberal minds, and a lavish table; and so he bore his exile."

"Thou hast known Father Castelli long?"

"All my life that was not spent in Spain; and 'twas from him that I received such scholarship as thou hast honored me with commending, Signor, as something unlikely in a mere swordsman, an artificer of blades, a teacher of the art of attack and defense. But we waste time; 'tis ever so with thee, Signor Roubillac; once another's interests and affairs break in upon thine own 'tis like thee to depart and forget why thou camest abroad. Nay, off with thy gown and vest, and it shall go ill with me, but I will arm thee against the reprobate Ziletto."

And so it came to pass that Pisani, the swordsman of Venice, began to teach Roubillac, the painter, to meet Ziletto, the sculptor, who had made his sword a passport to fame that he could never hope to achieve with clay or marble, even had he so desired; but he only affected to be dilettante in the plastic art, of which he rather assumed the position of the patron than the sculptor. For he was nobly born, and, though he had squandered much of his fortune, a man of wealth, who might vie with some of the richest in the Republic. As for his art, followed

with some show of liking and success—for there often came modelers and sculptors of repute to his studio in Florence, where he entertained with lavish state—there were reckless and irresponsible companions of his revels that vowed he had a contempt for the graphic arts one and all, and for any other but the arts of gallantry and love; though that which they called gallantry was a libel on manhood, and their love was a no less selfish and degrading passion.

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## CHAPTER TWO

### THE COURTSHIP AND MARRIAGE OF ROUBILLAC, THE PAINTER

BEFORE Francesca came into his life, Bernardo Roubillac was a dreamer, without ambition. His mind was filled with its own beautiful images. Woman had hitherto appealed to him only as a type of the heavenly beauty that he strove to realize on canvas. His career, if not illustrious, was assured. He loved his art for Art's sake, and his patron always told him that fame would follow.

But history proves to us that no great work was ever produced, no great deed ever accomplished, without the impulse of a great love, whether it be of woman or country, or parents or children; some strong human motive, that

gives the right direction to ambition and waits upon the aspirations of genius.

It was Francesca that inspired the art of Roubillac; but with passion comes unrest, and with happiness the trail of the serpent that sooner or later shadows all that is beautiful in this incomplete world.

There is, however, an undying consolation in the knowledge that beauty can never be wholly effaced. The influence of beauty is never lost. A thing of beauty is lovely even in decay, and before it is dead and gone and seen no more, it has projected the lesson of its creation into the ages for a moral, and happy are they who apply it. Witness Venice herself. Her decay began at the moment she was most powerful; her glory began to fade when she was most beautiful; but to-day her story gives new life to her dead palaces, and the poet has heralded her fame in numbers that may live when the waters of the Adriatic have returned to their natural landmarks, and Venice is no more than the dream she must often seem, even now, to those who, having once visited her, think of her always as an enchanting reminiscence.

It is no less strange how the story of heroic deeds, the instance of a noble human action, will sanctify some barren spot and give an ideal charm to prosaic things; thinking of which takes one far away from Venice to that mountain village in England, which, compared with the City of the Adriatic, is as a molehill to Mount Olympus, and yet in the loves of Roubillac and Fran-

cesca it looms up into the heaven of romance and gives a comparable dignity in which Venice does not carry off all the honors.

And so strange are the decrees of Fate that the interview between Roubillac and Pisani starts a link of undying interest between Venice and the hamlet of Eyan that brings the Euganean hills in sight of Froggatt's Edge, mingles the destinies of Mary Talbot and Reuben Clegg with those of the Italian lovers, and makes the music of Ziletto's mandolin as familiar in the valley of Middleton as it was on the moonlit lagoons of Venice.

Bernardo Roubillac was a protege of the family of the Valiero. They loved Art, and they loved Venice. The head of the house, now an old man, had a villa at Verona, and a palace at Venice, near the Rialto. All that taste and wealth could do to make these abodes beautiful was lavished upon them. Not alone a mere patron of the arts, this old man, Bertuccio Valiero, was an enthusiast in promoting the rivalry of the Venetian with other Italian republics. With a splendid munificence he had established in his palace an Academy of Fine Arts, where such youth as desired might study free of charge and with the aid of the best masters procurable.

Roubillac, having made sufficient mark to set up a studio of his own, chose to be near the palace, so that he might the more readily assist in promoting the welfare of the aspirants who availed themselves of the Academy and its privileges.

Now Francesca da Ponte was the daughter of a painter at Verona. She was orphaned when she was sixteen. The beauty of her person and the graces of her mind had commended her to the ladies of the Valiero family. She had also evinced a talent for the art of her father. In a design for tapestry she had won the high praise of Morosini, and it was a kindly thought that suggested to the Signora Valiero that Francesca might have the privilege of the gallery at Venice; and so it came to pass that one day, looking from his window across the Canal, Roubillac saw a gondola with two passengers, one a young girl and the other an elderly woman, evidently an attendant in her service; no unusual sight; but Fate was busy with Roubillac's future at that particular moment, and his eye followed the boat as it glided past the chief entrance to the palace and paused by the private way beneath his window. He opened his casement and looked out. The gondolier, with an air of respectful admiration, gave the younger of the passengers his hand. She stepped upon the palace quay and smiled her thanks, herself assisting her attendant to alight.

The whole scene was little more than a momentary incident; but in that flash of time the image of the girl went straight to Roubillac's heart; not, let it be said, to his artistic heart; the touch was keener. It came of no mere desire to paint the image that suddenly gave to the world a new light, setting the waters of the Canal dancing with fresh colors, and adding a

deeper hue to the blue sky, that made the Canal an azure sea, the palaces that fringed it, with the dome of the Church of the Salutation white against the sky, a fairy city, such as he had dreamed might be seen on the plains of heaven.

"It is a revelation," he said to himself, "an inspiration of living beauty;" and his pale intellectual face repeated the thought in a new expression. It was the love at first sight that comes with a rush to some hearts and burns the fiercer when the subject is past its youth and the sensibilities are somewhat dry, as a spark will ignite with a breath and bring into a glow the most withered tinder. Not that Roubillac was old, though he was twenty years her senior; she some sixteen summers. He was not more than thirty-six, though thought and an ascetic life had given him the appearance of a more advanced age.

Presently she passed into the Gallery. It was a rare thing for a woman to be seen there. On a few occasions the wives and daughters of artists had accompanied their friends who made studies in the gallery outside the precincts of the Academy proper. Roubillac had noticed that the girl, whose coming had moved him so deeply, carried a satchel common with students, and her attendant a small panel. He laid aside his work, and drawing his cloak about him, passed into the gallery with something of an acted preoccupation of manner. She was there, sitting before a head of Apollo and making a chalk study. There were other artists at work,

one other lady among them, but the girl of the gondola seemed to hold herself apart from the rest. The sudden interest that he felt in her was too intense for speech. He might have spoken to her, had he so desired, and no offense; even have offered her professional counsel; but he only ventured upon furtive glances at the newcomer, fearful lest any act or word of his should frighten the vision of beauty away.

And so, day after day, he came to the gallery, found that he could never settle down to his day's work without seeing her, and with a certain sting of pain there came also into his silent worship of her the joy of a new power in his art. It must be, he thought, that she had brought to him the divine spark. His soul had broadened out with a nobler feeling toward humanity. He was a new man; but how long would all this last? How long before he dared speak with her, and what would become of him the day she should have finished her study of the head that in its masculine beauty was almost a match with her own? He watched and waited for her. She came punctually, as the great clock of St. Mark's struck the hour, and she went away as regularly, her woman coming for her, the same gondolier in attendance at the private stairs of the palace. Roubillac found himself envying that gondolier, and he would stand, with his Dantesque-like face in his hands, watching the last sparkles that followed the great blade of the boatman long after the swanlike vessel had disappeared.

One day she did not come. It was a day of

darkness and misery. The next saw her not. It seemed as if the world was at an end for Roubillac. He went forth in search of the maiden and her attendant. He found their abode. He entered with the boldness of despair. She was ill. He brought her a physician, but she had no need of adventitious aid. She was well cared for. In the window of her chamber there were fresh flowers, and in the distance could be seen the blue waters of the Adriatic. He called every day. She recovered; and when she had left her chamber and descended into the little salon of the house, he was permitted to see her.

Thereupon began a new life for Roubillac. It was noticed by his few friends that the recluse went more abroad than usual; that he wore his gown with a new air; that it was richer than of yore, his vest somewhat more embroidered, and he carried a staff of rare wood mounted with gold. The gondolier and the serving maid of Francesca knew what had wrought this change in the painter; and he knew by what inspiration he seemed to be traveling for the first time on the road that led to Fame.

No lover could have had better excuse for an absorbing passion than Roubillac might have pleaded in the object of his devotion. Her beauty was Oriental rather than Venetian; black glossy hair, a complexion of delicate olive, suffused now and then by the blush of a sensitive temperament, which became as the passing of sunshine, leaving a shadow of retrospect behind.

She had a soft voice, languishing eyes, and a stately figure. The artist's consciousness detected all the beauties of her form and color; the lover's rapture idealized them.

It was an act of more than ordinary courage when Roubillac spoke to her in terms of love, for from the first she had seemed to him something more than mortal. She was strangely moved by a fine picture or a tender story; and when she came to his studio, accompanied by the woman with whom the Valiero ladies had placed her, she became engrossed in his work, in which he now found a new happiness.

When he confessed his love for her, and pressed it with a view to immediate marriage, she replied with more of gratitude than the deeper sentiment which he hoped he had inspired; but she allowed her hand to rest in his and suffered his embrace. He was too bewilderingly happy to note the absence of a loving response; and it was strange that when he looked for a reply in words she spoke of his Ascension picture. He had never dared to ask her to sit for his leading figure, but it had been in his mind, many a time and oft, to wonder if he might make so wild a request; and all the time, whenever he had sketched the subject, she had observed in the principal figure a likeness to herself. So, when he asked her to be his wife and she suffered his embrace, she said she would sit to him for his Ascension picture. It was an odd reply to the suit of a lover; but Francesca knew that in this she fulfilled half his desire, and she was anxious

to give him pleasure. He had failed to stir the secret impulse of her woman's heart in the way of love. It came, however—or so she thought—at a later day, when the altar-piece was finished and the painter's fame was on every lip, and he sat at her feet and gave all the praise to her, not alone for the angelic grace of her face and figure, but the inspiration he had found in his love for her; and so, ere they had known each other a year, they were married, and were happy, Roubillac beyond his wildest dreams, Francesca in a mild contented fashion.

It was at the height of Roubillac's happiness that there appeared in Venice Giovanni Ziletto, who came with the reputation of a sculptor, a traveler, and a diplomat; a man of extraordinary gifts and striking presence, younger than Roubillac, possessing graces of person and manners that tell with women and often beguile the good opinion of men. He danced divinely, could turn a quaint conceit of love in verse and sing it to his mandolin as if he had been brought up to naught but minstrelsy. He saw Francesca, and conceived a passion for her. Received by the Valieros and other eminent citizens, he obtained easy access to the home and studio of Roubillac. Francesca found in his manner a new charm. Rarely had she seen so handsome a figure; never listened to the conversation of a man who had seen so much of the great world, or who related what he had seen with such facility of language. Young as he was, he had visited most of the Courts of Europe, and in the most delicate way

imaginable succeeded in conveying to Francesca his opinion of the supremacy of her beauty in comparison with the fairest of every clime. It was not altogether the words he uttered that meant this, but she seemed to hear it in the strange music of his voice, and she made an excuse to retire to her room, lest the emotion he had aroused within her should be observed by Roubillac; for Ziletto knew how certain natures succumbed to his influence. Francesca had never yet felt the genuine impulse of passion, and she was afraid.

As the days wore on, Francesca began to look for Ziletto's coming; and Ziletto took occasion to seek for cause of quarrel with Roubillac, not alone by his outward show of gallantry toward the painter's lovely wife, but in such debates on art, and even politics, as should aggravate Roubillac into a challenge. Hence Roubillac's interview with Pisani.

All the while Francesca suffered the perplexities of doubts and fears such as she had never known. She felt that she had a secret, she hardly knew what, from her husband; an unworthy secret that she could not define. She struggled, as a dove might under the fascination of a snake. She felt that she was captive to Ziletto's whims, felt bound to listen to him. He stirred her heart as it had never been stirred, gave new fancies to her imagination. He drew her eyes toward him against her will, whether they met upon the Square of St. Mark's or even during the mass at St. Maria della Salute. She

sought relief in silent prayer, and at last took counsel with her confessor, the Monk Lorenzo, a conventual brother of that Father Castelli, sojourning in England, of whom we have heard.

And Roubillac continued to visit Pisani the swordsman.

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## CHAPTER THREE

### THE SERPENT AND THE DOVE

ON the brink of what would have been Ziletto's triumph and Francesca's destruction she flung herself into Roubillac's arms in a passion of tears, and confessed all.

"I am not myself," she said; "he has bewitched me. Even now he has made me promise to receive him in your absence. Forgive me! Save me! If I have not loved you as I should have loved, I am your wife, and thou hast translated my most unworthy image in thy great picture; and oh, Bernardo, I would be true to thy loving ambition, grateful for thy gentle care, worthy my father's name and thine!"

Roubillac soothed her with soft and gracious words, and begged her to tell him all, that he might be indeed her guardian and her deliverer; and as he looked upon her glowing features and parted lips, and felt her heart beat against his own, if more in fear than love yet with the instinct of purity, he knew how great a sacrifice a young girl may make who marries one so much

her elder, whose spring of love has been clouded by the world, and who has no response to the first whisperings of passion.

"You will be sent for," she said, now calm and firm in her words and manner; "an accident to the altar-piece, a gondola ready for you from the Governor, a carriage in waiting on the mainland. You will go—and then he will come; and I think I gave my consent. But I was under a spell! Forgive me! If you go to Verona without me I am lost! And whether you go or not hide me from this persecution. Oh, Bernardo, I suffer from an enchantment!"

As she spoke there entered, hurriedly, Ziletto himself. With the readiness of a keen and nimble wit he guessed what had happened. There was confession in the woman's eyes as she turned from him and clung to her husband.

"Well met, dear friends," he said, in his blindest voice. "I had feared that you, Signor Roubillac, had gone to Verona, since there is news of disaster to your Angel there, and I heard that you had been sent for, and came with haste to offer my poor services and comradeship perchance for the journey."

"You will accompany me?" said Roubillac.

"If it should so please you, my friend; if I do not seek too much honor in so addressing you."

"Francesca, my child, I will call your woman. You shall retire while I discuss this business with our friend."

Both Ziletto and Francesco noted the emphasis upon the sweet word "friend" that turned it into

sourness; and she clung still closer to Roubillac.

"Nay, I would prefer to stay," she said, with white lips and arms trembling.

"'Tis not fitting," said Roubillac, conducting her toward the door.

When the door was closed Roubillac drew a bar across it.

Ziletto watched him with a cynical smile, his hand upon his sword, his feet firmly planted to receive the painter's attack.

Roubillac flung aside his gown, and drew upon Ziletto with a gesture of abandon that gave a new dignity to his wiry if ascetic figure.

"Liar! Reprobate!" he hissed between his teeth. "Defend thyself!"

"I would prefer to have witnesses of your death, Signor Jealousy," said Ziletto, calmly drawing his weapon and standing on guard. "And 'twere surely to sully your wife's fair fame to fight about her so near her chamber door!"

"Fiend!" exclaimed Roubillac, "that shall be as Heaven wills it. Spare thy words and defend thy life."

"As you will," Ziletto replied, awaiting Roubillac's attack. "You hold your weapon as if 'twere a mahl-stick."

"Then feel its point!" hissed the painter, stung by the other's cool effrontery, and lunging at him with a quick and sudden fury.

It was only by a rare dexterity that Ziletto met his adversary's untrained and unusual at-

tack, Roubillac's point flashing before his eyes and inflicting a slight facial wound before he had almost whipped it out of Roubillac's grip and sent the painter staggering.

"Pisani would have condemned such play, Signor Roubillac, even had you killed your opponent," said Ziletto, scornfully, conscious of the slight warm trickle of blood that fell upon his hand.

While the sight of this red token of first blood maddened Roubillac almost with the rage of a murderer, it only cooled the nerves of the duelist and stimulated his finest play, which held Roubillac captive to his skill. He dallied with the painter's weapon, parried every attack with a scoffing laugh, and tortured him with the iron strength of his wrist. Roubillac felt the ground beneath him reel, and he knew that at any moment his life was in Ziletto's hand. At last, with one desperate and final effort he flung himself upon his adversary as he had done at the opening of the encounter, but only to find himself disarmed and with Ziletto's blade at his throat.

"Fool!" said the practiced duelist, "I spare thy life that Pisani may teach thee a new trick of fence, and Francesca be spared the scandal of a dotard's jealousy, to be turned into a ballad or animate the canvas of some vile painter of romance."

Sheathing his sword, Ziletto, drawing from his breast a lace handkerchief, wiped the few spots of blood from his face and turned upon his heel

as the good Father Lorenzo, who had confessed Francesca, entered the studio.

"Your blessing, holy father!" exclaimed Ziletto. "Nay, not for me, but for our friend, who hath a secret to impart to you only, for it is not likely he shall blab it in the streets. I commend him to your good advice."

With which insolent remark, Ziletto, with a profound obeisance, quitted the room. Roubillac, as a man in a dream, rose from his knees, where Ziletto had stood over him, and went to the window, to watch the reprobate, in his brocaded trappings and painted shoes, enter his gondola.

When Ziletto's gondolier had pushed off his boat and the sun was dancing gayly upon its track, Roubillac flung himself down upon the floor and sobbed.

It was long ere Pisani's pupil recovered himself sufficiently to listen to the message which the priest had brought him. It came in a letter from Father Castelli, and by the hands of an agent lately arrived in Venice to engage artists for the decoration of the Old Hall, in Derbyshire, England. There was also an altar-piece to be painted, and other work to be done for the chapel which the lady of the Old Hall had built. It had come into the mind of the confessor that it would be a wise and happy release from pressing troubles if Roubillac would take charge of this business, and ship himself and wife forthwith for England, with such companions as he should select for the work in hand, a work

that honored Art and the Church at the same time.

"It is a voice from Heaven," Roubillac replied.

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## CHAPTER FOUR

### MARY TALBOT

THINK of all the pictures you have ever seen of English village streets, with their invariable complement of an artistic feminine figure in the foreground, and you have already in your memory an impression of Mary Talbot and the village of Eyam.

At this distance of time one still sees her, unconsciously posed within its artistic focus, the very figure for the familiar scene, with a flood of autumn sunshine deepening the rich color of the fallen leaves.

She curtsied to the new rector, and they stood for a few minutes talking together on the village green, with its ancient Cross since removed to the churchyard, its new fountain, and its belt of sycamores that screened the emerald and purple distance, where stretches of forest and meadow and patches of yellow stubble broke up the splendid monotony of the moorlands.

If, in the painter's language, she was complementary to the background and the warm color of its accessories, the rector in his rusty black cassock, was of still further value in emphasizing the esthetic charm of the central figure.

There was no more attractive personality among all the beauties of the county than that of Mary Talbot. She was typical of the class of woman no man can pass, if he would, without a secret or open tribute to her unaffected charms.

It was just as natural for Mary Talbot to be fascinating as it was to be well dressed. She became her clothes, whatever they were, and she was beautiful, adorned or unadorned; it was her mission in life, she could not help it. Her features were not perfect according to the canons of art, nor her complexion an ideal study of color; but from head to foot she was the expression of a generous and loving nature, which, combined with a rare intelligence, distinguished her beyond all comparison, whenever comparison had come within range of local observation.

And she was content to be simply the belle and the Lady Bountiful of the village of Eyam, having no experience of any other place, beyond that of an occasional excursion to one of the few neighboring communities that were sparsely scattered among the hills and dales of the most lonely and least known districts of the North Midland counties.

As yet she was heart-whole; though she would not have been a woman had she been unconscious of the impression she had made upon more than one distinguished guest at the local palace of the Stafford-Bradshaws, simply known as the Old Hall; and she acknowledged to herself a certain sensation of pleasure in the consciousness of the admiration of Reuben Clegg, who was

eating his heart out for love and burning to tell her so, restrained only by fear that confession might cut him off from his cherished visits to the Manor House, where he had occasional business with her proud old Tory father.

Reuben Clegg was the man most feared in the village, alike by such intellect as it possessed as by its trained athleticism. To have his manliness and intellectuality doff its cap, as it were, before her on all occasions, to have him listen to her lightest word, to be at her beck and call, were triumphs of femininity that Mary Talbot valued more than the general admiration of the village and the petty jealousies of the overdressed ladies of the Old Hall, who, during their few months of residence there, treated the village church on Sundays to a display of complexions, patches, radiant curls, white bosoms, and brocaded gowns.

"I was going your way, Miss Talbot," said Clegg, overtaking her as she took leave of the rector. "May I walk with you as far as the Manor House?"

"I see no reason why you may not," she answered, giving him a coquettish glance that turned him hot and cold.

She noted the color come into his weather-tanned cheeks. He stroked his short brown beard in a nervous way. His evident embarrassment gave her more than a passing sensation of pleasure.

Even the dullest woman is complimented by the homage of brains. Clegg was looked upon

as the wisest man in the village. He was inclined to be reticent. The reason was that he held opinions upon many things which the village did not understand; and certain views which they thought they did understand they resented. They were proud of him in a negative kind of way. He had the gift of divination in the matter of hidden minerals and springs. Not only to his hazel wand did they owe the neighboring Winship Mine, but at his magic touch the brightest water supply in the Hundred had gushed from the rock as the water started forth from the rock in Horeb at the bidding of Moses.

"Your father seemed to look on something I said to the rector as an offense—"

"And you thought I agreed with him, I suppose—as if folk cannot have different opinions about the Trinity, or the Equator, or some other fashion of things, without offense."

"I fear they cannot," said Clegg, softening his strong voice, as he always did when he spoke to Miss Talbot, and even trying to tone down his dialect, though everybody, from Sir George Talbot to the meanest hind, spoke in a similarly uncultured manner and often in coarse terms.

"That is because you are so much in earnest."

"Ought a man not to be in earnest?"

"Oh, yes; but he should be considerate of others who have strong prejudices and less education."

"Rather a fine word, isn't it—education, Miss Talbot? Reading and writing belong to churchmen and the like, and education's a mystery, full

confession of which might get a man hanged for treason or burned as a magician."

"Not in these days, Mr. Clegg," said Mary. "It's no longer a crime for a man to say his soul's his own."

Mary had listened too often to Clegg not to know how he would have her talk to him. There is nothing more lasting in the way of education than intercourse with a master mind. Mary Talbot appreciated Clegg's intellectuality. He had often shaped her thoughts. She had been guided by his discourse in many ways. Her father enjoyed what he called a wrangle with Clegg, though their friendly controversies occasionally ended in a coolness that lasted for days. But for the influence of Mary they would have quarreled. Sir George patronized Clegg, who was the last man to submit to any affectation of superiority from any one; though he would have accepted a good deal of humiliation for Miss Talbot's sake. While she desired to please Clegg and keep him as a friendly ally, she had no intention of ever giving him an opportunity to confess his love for her. At the same time she liked to know that he took no interest in any other girl or woman in the village or elsewhere.

"I am inconsiderate to people then?"

"I think so."

"It is a kind of arrogance of opinion?"

"Something in that way."

"Thank you, Miss Talbot; you can be frank and kind at the same time. Most folk when

they are frank 'are rude, sometimes coarse; I suppose I am."

"I did not say that, Mr. Clegg," Mary replied, looking up into his face with a sympathetic smile; "but I think you lose friends by regarding things too seriously."

"I haven't many friends," he replied, thoughtfully.

"Oh, yes, I think you have."

"No. I don't make friends. The Crown and Anchor's the only meeting-ground one has, and our Eyam folk only see what's under their noses and only feel when they are pricked."

"There's the vestry meetings," she replied, reflectively, adding briskly, "and the new rector is accessible."

"I don't care much for rectors in a general way, and the other man is more to my liking."

"Now that he has been displaced," she replied again, with a friendly smile. "That's because you take sides naturally with the persecuted."

"It's kind of you to say so. Your father doesn't hold that opinion. I should be sorry to lose your friendship, Miss Talbot."

"Or my father's, surely," she answered, looking up into his anxious face, though her eyes fell as they encountered his steadfast gaze.

"He is orthodox of the orthodox, and sometimes perhaps I do not sufficiently respect his years or honorable position; that makes my heart a bit sore when I reflect upon it and think of him as your father."

"On his side he does not make allowance for the curious changes of our day, I fear; first one set of teachers and then another—Barebones this day, Silk and Feathers the next; good men—in office yesterday, rejected of the bishops on the morrow. But I know what you think about it all, Mr. Clegg."

"You are very good to have my opinions in your thoughts for a moment," said Clegg, a flush of color pouring over his face.

"Oh, but I never hear any others worth remembering," she said with complimentary promptitude, "always, of course, excepting what the rector says."

"Ah, Miss Talbot, if we had only a knowledge of each other's hearts, what misery and tribulation it might save us!"

"Nay, friend, I am not so sure of that; it is the only virtue of some folk that they succeed in hiding what's there," she answered, with a pretended cynical pout of her rosy lips, adding, as she noted the serious expression of Clegg's face, "but I am at home, so good-afternoon, sir; my father will be expecting me."

Clegg, who had intended making a call upon Sir George, mechanically lifted the latch of the gate, and stood with his broad felt hat in his hand until she had passed over the courtyard. Giving him a little curtsey at the open door of the Manor House, she disappeared, whereupon to Clegg for the moment all the whole world was a blank.

During their brief conversation he had experi-

enced a flutter of secret satisfaction in the certain belief that Miss Talbot had in a manner identified her views with his own sentiments, and evidently with the intention of giving him pleasure.

It did not occur to him that, apart from Mary Talbot's beauty, much of her popularity consisted in desiring to make everybody happy. She was considerate and condescending to the humblest. Nevertheless, it was quite worthy of emphasis that at the moment when Clegg felt himself more or less in disgrace with the new rector (he had long since outraged the highly-strung conscience of his predecessor), Miss Talbot should not only be tolerant of him, but sympathetic toward certain of his opinions.

When she put an end to Clegg's moralizing at her father's gates, he had become so unconscious of everything and everybody besides himself and his love that he was on the eve of blurting it out and taking the consequences. It is quite possible that she knew it, and it may not have been the first time that, by some deft feminine artifice, she had flung him off as she had done upon this occasion.

Thus Clegg fell back again into his twilight world of doubt and depression, wondering at the very temerity of his passion, and more at the sudden courage which had brought him to the verge of telling the girl that he loved her.

But when his mother had lighted the one long candle by which she read a chapter in the Bible before going to bed (for Reuben never controverted in their own house the reasonableness of

her long-tried faith), he confessed, almost with tears, what had been passing in his mind; and she said, "I knew it, Reuben, I knew it, and have prayed that One Above might favor thee in this, and turn her heart to thee and bless thee."

"Ah, mother, if One Above happened to be Sir George Talbot and thou hadst influence with him, a prayer in that quarter might help me;" for it soured him to hear, as he often did, of people praying for things without receiving the faintest show of a favorable answer.

"Reuben, my dear, it pains me to have thee scoff at prayer. God has answered me many a time when thou hast been in danger and in trouble; and not so long since, when one was taken and the other was left in that accident at the Mine, it was thou that God rescued."

"Forgive me, mother; it hurts me most when I do aught to pain thee," Reuben replied, taking her face between his two great hands and kissing her.

"Why dost thou not confess to the girl herself, so free and familiar as thou art with her father, a guest in his house, and the author of his wealth, or most of it? For it was thou who struck the lead of the Winship, and made him master of the land when thou mightst have bought it for thyself."

"Nay, mother; it was his in fee, and I've reason to be content with my share of the revenue."

"And I love thee the more, Reuben, that thou

art liberal and free-handed. I would have thee always so; and who knows but the maiden is waiting for thee to be open with her, and looks for thee one day to speak to her father?"

"I'm ten or twelve years her elder, mother, and I look my years and twenty more," he said, as he pushed a tall-backed armchair into the doorway where he was wont to sit at even-time watching the landscape, sometimes smoking and listening to his mother's chat and gossip, at others poring over the pages of a volume of serious import—a journal of travel, a treatise on science, a chapter of history, often a play by William Shakespeare.

"The better thou art fitted to be her protector," said Mrs. Clegg, as Reuben seated himself and sighed over the thought that he was in more ways than this one of age hardly a desirable suitor for the hand of Mary Talbot. "She cannot always have Sir George with her any more than thou canst have me, though I may be far beyond Sir George's age; and if thou wert not my own son, Reuben, I would tell thee to thy face that if she be sweet and fair thou art strong and lovable, and hast no match in all the broad country either for thy—"

"Peace, mother," said Reuben, turning toward her. "Thou art a witness of prejudice where my character is concerned."

"But an thou dost not speak to her, Reuben, wilt let me be thy messenger?"

"Thee, mother?"

"Ay, me. She has no mother, the more's the

pity. Why should she not listen to thine? Who can know thee so well, who so fitted to speak for thee?"

"Nay, mother," he replied, rising, "if I cannot speak for myself I'll have no go-betweens, not even thee, my love, not even thee," and he took her into his great manly arms and pressed her to his heart.

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## CHAPTER FIVE

### HOW STRANGERS CAME TO EYAM

A LITTLE world in itself, the village of Eyam might have been a lonely island of the sea, far from the track of ships, so completely was it cut off from the great centers of English life and action. There were not wanting, however, in its annals stories of love and intrigue, instances of courage and self-denial, and other passages of romance worthy of the historian and the poet.

The record of its heroism, which fills one of the most impressive chapters in the annals of England, began with a peaceful invasion, a brief description of which will mark at once the period of our narrative and suggest the atmosphere that belongs to it.

To the student who had eyes and thoughts that ranged far beyond the hills that shut in the village of Eyam from the great world, the time was full of high ambitions. Histories of the triumphs and adventures of the British pioneers

of the days of Elizabeth had become familiar among those who read, and strange incidents of new discoveries and warlike episodes gave a poetic glamour to the narratives of soldiers and sailors in cottage homes and tavern parlors. The death of Cromwell had followed the execution of Charles, and the restoration of monarchy had given a fresh impetus to the national love of romance. Eyam was, however, tucked away from all this—a village retreat outside the world, except for such influence as the Old Hall brought to bear upon it once in a way, and the occasional giving forth of Reuben Clegg on some subject that became controversial between him and Sir George, or the rector; for he rarely had patience to take the Crown and Anchor into his intellectual confidence. Not that he was in the least priggish or self-conscious by reason of his superior knowledge, but the company at the Crown and Anchor was wooden, prejudiced, and largely under the control of the Constable of Eyam, who was egotistical in his ignorance and something of a jack in office.

One Saturday afternoon, when Reuben Clegg was smoking his after-dinner pipe, he suddenly rose from his chair, and first gazing down into the glen, and then turning toward his mother, who, having cleared the dinner things away, was taking up her knitting, and preparing for a chat, he said, "What's coming yonder, mother?"

"Nay, whither?" she asked, stepping into the sunshine, and shading her eyes with her brown right hand.

“Winding through the oaks at the foot of the dale,” Reuben replied, pointing toward Calver, where his keener vision had detected the unaccustomed sight of a cavalcade entering the rocky defile of Middleton Dale, and climbing toward the plateau upon which straggled the picturesque village of Eyam.

It was a calm, sunny day, one of those days in the late autumn when it seems as if summer has come back again—the earth dry, and little moisture in the air, red berries on the hedges in place of the fallen leaves, the sky far away, the trees and the mountains clean-cut against the horizon, like the work of a fine etching.

A radiant vision of the Orient could not have been more startling or wonderful to Clegg and his mother than the strange procession which riveted their attention as it appeared and then disappeared at intervals in the winding glen.

It came and went, in and out of sudden curves, under the white limestone rocks that the centuries had molded into fantastic shapes, such as palaces, castles, loopholed fortresses and church steeples.

At first it looked like the vanguard of an army. Clegg, for a moment, wondered if he should arm himself and alarm the village. The next moment, as he got a clearer view of it, he remembered having heard of the carriage of goods and the journeying of travelers on pack-horses, of which the strange procession evidently consisted, for now he could see the baskets on each side of the horses, and the riders between them. The latter, however, were attired in

robes and headdresses, the like of which had never previously come under his notice, except in pictures illustrating an edition of Shakespeare that he had bought when he journeyed into Hallamshire on the business of the Winship Mine, and in a copy of the Scriptures which his mother read night and morning—an heirloom of her family, one of the few treasures she had brought with her, as she often told her son, when she married his father. She was a widow now, and had worn her weeds ever since Reuben was a lad.

The cavalcade, slowly approaching the bend of the road that was immediately overlooked by Clegg's cottage, had a strange and foreign appearance. It was a caravan, attended by outriders and guards, the latter exercising similar duties to the escorts of the Arab merchants in the desert. They were evidently Englishmen, nevertheless. Their stout leathern jerkins, felt hats, and untanned riding-boots of somber color heightened the gay clothes and ribbons, and other finery, of the men and women who rode between the baskets of the pack-horses.



## CHAPTER SIX

### THE WOOING OF REUBEN CLEGG

THE travelers were clearly foreigners; "barbarians," Mrs. Clegg suggested. "Might be

show-folk or gypsies, or the like, in such tags and finery."

"Thou'rt right, mother; they might be folk out of a mystery play, or a legend of Egypt; I've never seen the like."

"Nay, Reuben, I'll be bound thou'lt mek summat fanciful on it, the way thy head runs on things that rightly belong to dreams," said his mother, with a look at her son of mingled admiration and trouble.

And yet, in his appearance, Clegg had little that one associates with the appearance of a romantic man. There was one in that procession coming up the glen who carried an air of romance in every feature, and another of the same nationality, destined to make a later appearance in Eyam, who might have posed as a troubadour, with olive complexion, raven locks and flashing eyes, and with a gift of minstrelsy; but Reuben Clegg was of the British yeoman type, strong, matter-of-fact, somewhat angular, with a determined, square chin, half-hidden by a rough beard, a nose that was bony and firm in outline, a forehead square and hard, with no more of the retreating angle in it than there was of retreat in the Clegg nature when the Clegg nature was in battle array either against the hard rock of the Winship Mine or in argument with Sir George Talbot, the rector, or the fathers of the village at the Crown and Anchor.

At the same time there was much that was gentle in Clegg's disposition. He was tender with children and humane to animals. Mary

Talbot could have linked him to her wrist with a silken chain, as she did practically link him to her service. His hair was closely cropped, and in this respect suggested the Cromwellian soldier, though Clegg had done no fighting either for the Unicorn or the Crown. Nor was he reputed in the village as a fighting man, either in sport or earnest; though in the village games, whenever he had been induced to take a hand, he had invariably held his own.

The villagers called him "Old Thoughtful." They had called him "Old Thoughtful" ever since he was a lad.

Once upon a time he didn't care a farthing what he was called. His mind was engrossed in what was at that day a somewhat primitive study—the revelations of geology.

Furthermore, he was learned in other directions. Contrasted, indeed, with what other people about him knew, his knowledge was uncanny.

It was an ignorant and a sordid age. The women were drudges; the men lived coarse lives, but cultivated the virtues of loyalty and hospitality. The country was prosperous. Food was plentiful. It was cooked and served in abundance, and with rigid simplicity. Eyam, a model village in its way, was primitive in its life and habits, superstitious, doubtful of the good faith of studious men, and uncompromisingly suspicious of strangers.

The daughter of Sir George Fanshawe Talbot (the chief personage in the village, its local magistrate and general patron), Mary Talbot,

as we have already understood, was far above Clegg's station in life in an age when the different classes of the people were emphatically distinguished one from the other.

Sir George and Clegg were, however, on intimate terms, not alone because Clegg interested Sir George, and there was something to learn from him, but for the reason that to all intents and purposes he was Sir George's partner in the lead mine that had done so much toward the mending of his fortunes, not to say the making of them. The lead deposits, their extent and capability of being worked, had been entirely Clegg's discovery. The mine was one of the triumphs of the divining rod.

It must not be understood from the fact of Clegg establishing a belief in the occult power of the rod that he was a pretender to supernatural powers, or in any respect a charlatan.

The *Virgula Divinatoria*, or divining rod, is employed to this day in the Midland counties and further North, where the character of the districts is metalliferous. If at the end of the nineteenth century this may be regarded only as evidence of the tenacity of tradition and superstition, the rod, in the diviner's hands, was contemplated with certain awe in the days of Reuben Clegg. It was generally a forked twig of the hazel tree or the white thorn. Held in a peculiar way, at an angle of seventy degrees, it was grasped strongly and steadily in the hand. The operator walked over the ground, and when he crossed a lode the twig bent. A similar

course was adopted for the discovery of water; and local newspapers of the present year of 1896 contain accounts of the finding of an unsuspected and valuable spring by a Midland counties diviner.

Clegg had a knowledge of the mysteries of things, and had studied the geological formation of the district of Eyam. In his hands the divining rod may have been thoughtfully directed, though Clegg assuredly believed in the assistance of its peculiar powers. Besides his other gifts—and reading and writing were by some regarded as gifts of Providence at that time—Clegg was a man of parts, and a notable figure in the villages that were dotted, here and there, at long distances apart, among the hills of the High Peak Hundred.

Sometimes Clegg wished that Mary Talbot, besides being the prettiest girl in the village, had been the poorest; for then, perhaps, his ability to provide her with a more than ordinarily furnished house might have had weight with her. But she was not only his superior in respect of the world's goods (she was her father's only child, and heiress to property bequeathed by her mother), but they were still further separated by the barrier of descent.

The Talbots were an old and aristocratic family. Reuben Clegg belonged to the yeomanry of the county, and held a few acres of land that had come down to him through several generations. He was, however, of no account measured by the standard of the great landed

gentry, though for a time it had been considerably lowered through the Revolution. That was all over now, and under the Restoration the old arrogance of blood was beginning to make itself felt again; not in Eyam, perhaps, for nothing had much altered the manners and customs of Eyam—Monarchy, Democracy, Republicanism, Imperialism, Papism, Presbyterianism—until a year or two previous to the beginning of this present history, when Anne of Stafford married Francis Bradshaw, bringing to the Old Hall, near Eyam, more than a quarter of a million sterling, together with a strong leaning toward Roman Catholicism and much fashionable ostentation.

The Old Hall was partly new in those days, being an extension of the magnificent house of the Staffords. It was by reason of an ambitious scheme for the beautifying and decoration of a recently added new wing that, as if by magic, the narrow road below Clegg's cottage was filled with that strange procession. The travelers had begun their pilgrimage in the sunny streets of Florence and Verona, to take ship from the historic quays of Venice and thence to the Thames, meeting their guards and attendants in London, and journeying day by day through the strange land into the heart of the North Midland counties.

Reuben Clegg was a little over thirty, Mary Talbot in her twenty-first year; both looked older than their age, Clegg from exposure to the weather and a hard life of physical labor and

mental study, Mary by reason of her finely developed figure and perhaps a certain habit of authority. Just as Reuben was beyond the other natives of the village in cultivation and knowledge, so was Mary Talbot beyond other girls in her womanly manner, her commanding figure and the maturity of her charms. It must not be understood by this that she was a rural Betty or a pastoral Dorothy, of ample bust and ruddy features, a ripe peach of young womanhood, a village belle such as the old painters depicted riding pillion with father or mother to market; she was quite another kind of person.

In the way of dress she occasionally took a hint from the fashions of the ladies of the Old Hall, but she had as much discretion in this connection as she had exercised in checking Clegg's expression of admiration. These, as we have seen, had to be rather the language of the eye than the tongue.

Clegg experienced passing fears that Mary might be tempted to imitate the frivolous habits as well as the showy gowns and low bodices of the dames from the Old Hall, who gave Eyam its only glimpses of Metropolitan manners, its "bad and hateful manners" Clegg called them; but Mary had a way of adapting new fashions to her own individuality with a resultant harmony that left no discord or ragged ends. She was not a perfect type of physical beauty by any means. There was, in fact, a lady sitting on one of those pack-horses that were toiling up the glen to the village street who was far more

lovely from a sculptor's or a painter's point of view; but Mary had a peculiar charm of her own that was irresistible; even women felt it, and every man acknowledged it. She was of an exceedingly fair complexion, in which she might be regarded as typically English. Her hair was a light brown. When the sun shone into its tresses they were golden; though in no respect to be compared with what we in these degenerate days call golden—towy, dyed, lifeless locks with which women mock their natural complexions. It was hair that possessed the gloss of life and health, and when it was not gathered up in a mass beneath a kerchief or French hood it was looped negligently about her head, and looked what a woman's hair was once regarded—the chief glory of her person. She carried herself with an easy, graceful manner, was of a cheerful temper, and inclined to be coquettish.

Clegg sometimes feared she laughed merely to show her teeth, that were white and regular, though dentistry in those days was neither an art nor a profession.● You could hardly tell what was the color of her eyes. Nor were her eyebrows quite regularly arched, but they gave character to the face, which was not ennobled with the kind of nose that is said to indicate aristocratic origin; it was nevertheless delicate, the clean-cut nostrils, rather open, betokening good temper and artistic feeling. Her mouth was of a generous mold—too generous, perhaps—according with her disposition, which induced

what in cities would be regarded as undue trustfulness in overemphasized friendships, the weakness of the unsophisticated.

A disposition of this kind, however, was quite in keeping with the village life of Eyam, where everybody knew each other, the community being more or less one family, with its black sheep it is true, its internal quarrels and troubles, its joys and sorrows, but all open and above-board; no hole-and-corner conspiracies, no secret distresses, no creeping into back garrets to die, no robberies and murders, such as belong to the dark side of cities; a happy human village, with one or two rich inhabitants, the rest more or less on an equality of decent poverty, some living out of their bit of land, a few by their looms, a handful of men working at the Winship Lead Mine. These latter were regarded as skilled laborers—they were of a different type from the miners of the present day.

Around this interesting community stretches a romantic country of hill and dale. Perched upon a platform above the valley of the Derwent, the long village street, ~~cont~~ lined by rugged oak and elm, has Bradwell Edge running up against the sky to the westward and below the romantic dale of Middleton. It is connected with the latter by two precipitous openings called Eyam Dale and the Delf, the one destined to a double fame in these annals as the scene of a tragedy and the other for its natural pulpit of a hero of the Church—but not for that Church which had for its more or less secret representative the

hooded priest who was watching from the highest window of the Old Hall for the coming of his countrymen, according to advices from Father Lorenzo in Venice, and, more recently, from Lady Stafford in London.

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## CHAPTER SEVEN

### THE PAGEANT OF THE PACK-HORSES

THE picturesque procession of pack-horses had commenced the journey from the Mersey. Liverpool had only been twenty years a free port, having been hitherto subject to the authority of Chester.

The vessel that had winged her way from the Adriatic to the Irish Sea, and finally anchored at the mouth of the Mersey, had landed her passengers at the nearest point for Eyam instead of making the port of London, whence it would have been necessary to transport them by carriage to Derbyshire. c.

A carriage and six horses, with relays along the route, was necessary for a journey from London to the Peak. Nor would six horses have been sufficient for the Old Hall's foreign guests, considering the amount of luggage they carried. Apart from their personal effects and wardrobes, they brought the tools and appliances of their arts, and these were both various and many.

Pack-horses traversed the country from Lon-

don, but as a rule only with goods. The humbler sort of persons journeyed between the laden panniers, but at little more than a walking pace. It was, however, no great distance from Liverpool to Eyam, though not devoid of difficulties and dangers. Arranging for intervals of rest, the pack-horse had been deemed the best method for conveying the strangers from the Mersey to the valley of the Derwent.

History records the first daring innovation in the way of transit as having been made at about this time in the first "Flying Coach," which had been constructed and horsed to perform the journey between London and Oxford between sunrise and sunset.

It was in the autumn of 1663, when the pageant of the pack-horses was seen entering the defile of Middleton Dale, watched, from their cottage door, as we have seen, by Reuben Clegg and his mother, and eagerly scanned from a greater distance by Father Castelli.

Presently, a rare gleam of color among the rocks and foliage of the valley, it mounted the steep ascent and entered the village street. Its incidents of blue and gold and flashes of burnished harness met with a bright rivalry of varied hues in the garden flowers that could be seen, through the fences and over the garden walls of nearly every dwelling place.

Early as the period was in the history of gardening, Eyam made a rare horticultural show, promoted and encouraged by her great festival of the year, which has descended to her neigh-

bors, and is still celebrated in the year of grace 1896, when spring came as usual to Tissington with its fete of Ascension, a religious ceremonial that links the festivals of ancient Italy with the Christian observances of the third and fourth centuries, and thence onward to the present day, though nowhere else in England is Christ's Ascension celebrated as it is in the valley of the Derwent, and as it was in the early days of Eyam.

It is strange that Roubillac, the painter, and his dark-eyed companions should have traveled from the Adriatic Sea to find in one of the most remote villages of England a survival of their ancient festal tribute to Flora.

Eyam had gathered her first flowers of the budding year and dressed her wells and sung its Glorias over her fountains in the latter days of May, 1663, had also held her annual wakes, and had settled down to the storage of her oats and wheat, and her vegetables and fruits, for the coming winter; for it was now autumn, with brown and yellow leaves on the trees, a carpet of the same on the roadways, and at night the hunters' moon up in the blue heavens.

There was no smoke of coal to dim the silver planet's radiance; and she had, one cannot help believing, more light to reflect from her lord the sun than is vouchsafed to her in these latter days, if the poetry of the time may be trusted as a guide to the character of the seasons. We are apt to decorate the past with a sunshine that obtains an added glow from the imagination.

If a century is but a geological second, the two hundred and sixty odd years upon which we are looking back can hardly have had bluer skies than are still vouchsafed to the pastoral stretches of English country where the perfumes of peat and wood fires still permeate the wholesome atmosphere.

Every cottage in the village was alive with spectators as the foreign procession began to file along the village street with jingle of harness and crack of whips and chatter of foreign tongues.

Most of the houses were built of stone quarried in the neighborhood, and thickly thatched, the roofs brown and yellow with lichen or green with house-leek. As a rule they were detached dwellings, though here and there two or three were joined together. The doors were square, with heavy stone joists, though archway entrances varied the primitive style in some instances, with the addition of decorative window jams. Small diamond panes, some of them with bulbous centers—bottle-panes we call them now—were general; and the architectural line of roofs and gables was agreeably broken, with a picturesque effect of outline in stone and thatch, and overhanging trees, in one heavy clump of which a rookery had been suddenly awakened into inquisitive cries and bustle. Their ragged nests could be seen among the swaying leaves, clusters of which, shaken by the unusual fluster of the cawing lodgers, fluttered down into the roadway.

Roubillac, the painter, noticed all this, and

drew the attention of his wife to the various incidents that appealed to his artistic vision.

They had pulled up, with the rest, before the unpretentious portals of the village inn, the Crown and Anchor, the sign of which was swinging from a curiously-wrought iron bracket, riveted upon a flag-pole in the center of an open space, the house being set back from the highway; and it had, near the entrance door, an oaken bench, and a small fountain that made rippling music in a drinking-trough for cattle.

Eyam was noted for its plentiful supply of water, and not the least interesting point along the street was the deep pool that reflected the leafy surroundings and patches of blue sky near the Manor House, the only important residence in the village street. It was set back, like the village inn, but with a stone-paved courtyard and a walled-in garden and bowling-green.

At the tall iron gates of the Manor House, as the procession had filed by, stood Sir George Fanshawe Talbot, knight and baronet, and his daughter, Mary Talbot, with a few servants at their back, not in attendance, as it might have seemed, but spectators, like their master and the belle and beauty of Eyam, to whom, as they passed, the Italians had doffed their caps. Each of the travelers sat between two baskets or panniers, that were filled with various kinds of baggage.

At the Crown and Anchor the travelers dismounted, with sighs and laughter, some of them tired and weary, others too delighted with the

prospect of the journey's ending to restrain their expressions of joy. Signor Bernardo Roubillac appeared to be the chief personage, and Signora Roubillac his principal charge. She was much younger than he, and, at a glance, while the procession was passing the Manor House, Mary Talbot felt that here was a rival beauty, dark and gypsy-like though she might be. It interested her deeply to learn that she would be likely to be the guest of the Old Hall for some time. Both she and her father found it difficult to quite realize the importance of mere painters or artificers, but Sir George had been to court and had learned in what estimation these Florentine artists were held; and he had reason to believe that in securing the services of Roubillac and his companions the Bradshaws had been honored by the king's own advice and introduction.

Bernardo Roubillac had been commissioned to decorate my lady's chamber in the Italian manner, together with the chapel in the new wing of the Old Hall that had been built in honor of her marriage, and, it may as well be said, with her own money; for she had not only brought fashion and courtly manners to her Derbyshire home, but wealth—a matter of importance to the owner. Although he had escaped the general plunder of the times, he had gambled away his estate, not in the taverns of London, but at the Wells that had suddenly become the resort of a handful of the nobility, within a day's journey of the little-known village of Eyam.

Mary Talbot's intuitive appreciation of the

beauty of the foreign lady was fully justified by the reality. Nor was Mary the only person to be impressed by the new comer. The villagers maintained a respectful distance while the travelers alighted at the inn. A few, more actively inquisitive than the rest, stood by the inn door, several of the men lending a hand to the muleteer-like attendants in loosening the harness of the horses and helping to water them. Otherwise, most of the villagers contented themselves by standing at their doors or looking out from their windows; and the majority were women, the men being at work in the fields or at the Winship Mine.

Nor were the Italians altogether singular in the artistic cut and color of their clothes. The villagers were mostly in somber colors, but they wore the hood with which ladies themselves enveloped their heads when they wore no comode; and when dressed in their best, as on Sundays, they donned a hat with the brim slightly turned up, a laced bodice, sleeves slightly puffed and with cuffs and narrow frills; at the waist a gay bunch of ribbon secured the apron, and upon the high-heeled, sharp-pointed shoes they also sported smart bows of ribbon. The men attired themselves very much after the manner of the pack-horse attendants, in buff jerkin and hose of calves' leather, with round felt hat of the Charles pattern, or of the more formal cut of the Roundhead. There was a good deal of variety in the men's clothes, since the severity of the Puritan was once more merging into the

gay and negligent attire of the cavalier. Sir George Fanshawe Talbot, for instance, wore his lace cloak and well-trimmed pointed beard and rapier, like the old Tory that he was, though he did not permit his daughter Mary to emulate the ladies of the Old Hall, except with such modest adaptation of curls and furbelows as might become the virtuous maiden who, besides maintaining the dignity of her position, should set a fair example to her humble sisters of Eyam.

The Signora Francesca, wife of the painter Roubillac, wore a gown of a rich material that had never yet been seen in Eyam, even when the ladies of the Old Hall had descended upon the church at Easter, or had graced the festival of the Springs with their presence. It was of a deep blush red, a new color even in Italy, and had a sheen that flashed in the sun and, by contrast, made the black silk and soft-lined cloak or mantle that fell from her shoulders in a straight line to her dainty heels black as her raven hair, which rippled in masses from a small close-fitting cap fastened to her tresses with silver pins. It was hardly a traveling costume, and yet it seemed quite regular and appropriate to the wearer.

The signora looked round upon the scene with soft dreamy eyes, violet in color, a marked contrast to her hair and her olive complexion. Her face was oval, and her under lip had a dimple in it, as if there was a hidden smile there that Love had not yet lighted upon. Her beauty was Oriental, foreign, luscious, and yet it sug-

gested restraint, self-suppression, something of introspection; altogether different from Roubillac, whose heart seemed to look out from his eyes, now and then with an anxious kind of happiness, now and then with a burning inspiration. His was an ascetic face; long, pale, closely shaven, almost Dantesque. He also wore a long cloak, not ample, as cloaks are made in these days, but fitting almost close to the figure. He also wore the bechetto or scarf, flung loosely round his breast. When his cloak was flung back, showing its purple silk lining, the front folds of the bechetto partly hid the closely buttoned vest, with its linen collar, but altogether unlike the cut of the bodice of the signora; and they both wore a band round their necks—Roubillac, some Order of Honor terminating in a burnished star, the lady, a rich necklet of beads of many hues and shapes.

When the steward rode down from the Old Hall to conduct them thither, they had already entered the village inn. The steward said it was his master's wish that they should go straightway to the Old Hall without resting at the village, seeing that their destination was only a mile hence, and every preparation had been made for their reception.

Signor Roubillac, however, explained that the signora had desired to rest a while before their reception at the Old Hall. No further answer was deemed necessary, for what the signora desired was law to Roubillac and the rest, and they all adored her; and none of them grudged her

the homage she exacted, for she was a generous mistress, and had done much to glorify their art, and was beloved of all in Venice.

They were a remarkable little company; mosaic workers from Venice, wood-carvers from Florence, and painters from Verona, with Roubillac at their head—the Roubillac who had revealed his genius in the Church of San Stefano, at Verona, in an altar-piece that had suddenly given him a foremost place among the painters of the great cities of the Art world of Italy.

It was to his wife, Francesca, that he owed the inspiration for that great work, and the most sublime achievement of the painter, in the central figure of the group, was done from a study of Francesca herself. It was no mere blonde angel, with blue eyes and golden hair; but a flesh and blood realization of beauty, with the glow of heaven on its rich complexion, and the divine light shining among its raven tresses—a novel treatment, and full of startling contrasts of form and color and idealized womanhood that lifted the sister angels into a rivalry of adoration.

Several of the men (some of them mere artificers and assistants) had brought their wives. Signora Roubillac was attended by her maid. There were also several serving-women, for Lady Stafford's agents and the good Father Lorenzo at Venice had taken up her instructions with no niggard hands. Her ladyship, moved by an impulse of ambition, and the first stirrings of English aspirations toward decorative art, had

resolved to have no other palace in the Peak outvying the Old Hall, and there was no longer any Bess of Hardwick to compete with.

Thus it was that Eyam rose up on an eventful day to assist at a peaceful invasion of foreigners, but for whose advent this romance of the mountain village of the Peak would have had little "raison d'être," notwithstanding certain other engrossing passages of an impressive history.

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## CHAPTER EIGHT

### THE CONSTABLE WHO NEVER HEARD OF DOGBERRY

"A MONSTROUS ungodly lot!" remarked Humphrey Dakin, the constable of Eyam, looking for approval toward Reuben Clegg, who sauntered up to the little crowd by the inn door as the foreign procession with its muleteer-like attendants resumed its march, making for the Old Hall, which could be seen from the village street among the half-stripped trees.

"Nay, everything seems ungodly to thee, Dakin, that thou canst not understand," said Clegg.

"That's one for t' constable," said John Radford, the master of the Crown and Anchor, thrusting his big hands into the ample pockets of his long broidered vest.

Radford was a burly fellow, with coarse feat-

ures and a coarser laugh. He rolled in his gait and gurgled in his speech. He forced his good humor. It was his business to be mirthful—so he thought, at least.

The bystanders laughed at his observation from sheer goodwill. They didn't love Clegg any more than they loved the constable; the first was something of a mystery to them, and the second was ostentatious in his office, an exaggerated imitation of the magisterial manner of Sir George Fanshawe Talbot. They remembered that the constable had once upon a time been wont to call Clegg ungodly, which Clegg had taken a subtle opportunity of resenting without seeming to do so. There had been a friendly wrestling match on the Green at the Feast, and Clegg, in a bout with Dakin, had flung him somewhat viciously, to the laming of the constable for half a year.

"Well, come, Master Reuben," said the constable, "if I say a thing's ungodly, it's in a promiscuous way and moun't be taken as a matter of rebuke, though you do give forth opinions out of the common when the Catechism is considered, and such."

"There's no need to go much out of what thou calls the common to puzzle thee, old Dogberry," Clegg replied.

"Why 'old Dogberry'?" said Dakin, pursing his lips and puffing out his buttoned cloak.

"Because thou'rt such a Solon, Dakin; and Dogberry was a wise constable who knew his office and was as pretty a piece of flesh as any

in Messina, and comprehended the law, mark you."

"I never heard of the fellow," Dakin replied, "and I suspect thou'rt laughing at me in thy sleeve; an' if thou art, beware if one day the laugh doth not come to my turn, in the course of Nature."

"I shall remember," Clegg replied; and the bystanders winked knowingly one to the other as much as to say, "There will be things worth seeing when that comes about," little dreaming how soon the constable's turn might come.

"The law's not to be ridiculed contumaciously," said the constable, glaring upon the crowd. "And a constable's a constable, mark you, whether his name be Dakin or Dogberry—a fellow that I say is unknown to me, and is of no account in the Hundred of the Peak, where there's no such place as Messina, and nothing like it."

"Ho, ho! Ha, ha!" gasped Radford, who felt that it was time to get a laugh into the conversation. His guffaw met with no response from the crowd.

"Whether they be ungodly or no, Master Constable," said Clegg, "I cannot say, but I agree with you in the remark that yonder strangers are a queer lot."

Then turning to Jacob Cutts, the tailor, he asked, "Marked you the woman with the shining robes, something after the Queen of Sheba?"

"Indeed and I did," replied Cutts, in mild voice and with deferential manner. He was thin

and under the medium height, his face cleanly shaven, his hair oiled and curly, his costume a modification of the Cromwellian and the Royalist, a compromise to suit the tastes of his customers. He was the only tailor for miles round, and he had of late become a person of importance in the village, for he had been employed by more than one visitor to the Old Hall. Once in two or three years he had been in the habit of receiving patterns and complete outfits all the way from the capital; recently he had given out that this would be an annual custom.

"And the gypsy took my attention also," said the constable, comforted somewhat by Clegg's indorsement of his opinion of the foreigners. "And when you came up we were sayin' that she might have been the Jezebel of Scripture herself if she hadn't been so much like what they call the Scarlet Lady of Rome."

"I see you desire to comprehend her," said Clegg, with just the flicker of a cynical smile at the corners of his sensitive lips.

"No, Master Clegg, I had no thought of it. God forbid she should come into my hands! An' if I had the locking of her up in the round-house I'd expect her to vanish through the keyhole, for I misdoubt me she's no better than a witch, with hair as black as a crow, and eyes that are full of the Evil One, and such!"

"Nonsense, Dakin; nonsense, neighbors," Clegg replied, addressing all the bystanders. "If I said the strangers seemed a queer lot, I had no meaning of such rank disparagement as

the constable. Yonder woman, look yóu, comes from a land where the sun always shines, and the common people speak poetry better than the songs of Jasper, the minstrel of Hallamshire; it's natural to them. And the village children in their country play better music than Eyam, with its psalters and its sackbuts and viols, makes on Sundays in the church. I've been speaking with Sir George. They are Italians, he tells me, come to paint the Old Hall and fill it with pictures of what you call angels and what poets call gods and goddesses; so that yonder house of Chatsworth, in the valley, and all old Bess of Hardwick's fanciful architecture and decoration shall be eclipsed, as the sun eclipses the moon, by the Stafford-Bradshaws."

The constable, Radford, Cutts and the rest looked at each other with bewildered and inquiring glances.

They knew nothing of gods and goddesses. One God they knew, and no other. The rector took care, so far as he was concerned, they shouldn't forget Him; and his ejected contemporary, who still lived in the village, supplemented his worthy brother's endeavors.

Clegg's speech sounded to them Papistical; but the master of the Winship was known not to favor any outward and visible sign of faith, and he held strangely unorthodox, not to say atheistical opinions of the future life. "Man makes his own heaven and hell upon earth," was one of his mottoes. Furthermore, he had declared that neither the Presbyterians, the In-

dependents, the Catholics, nor any other professional gospels had any patent for saving souls. They had all at one time or another heard him say these things, and they felt that if there was anything occult or unholy, schismatic or treasonable going on at the Old Hall that was to be exemplified in Pagan pictures or otherwise, it was Lady Anne who would be to blame.

"What Master Bradshaw could have been thinkin' about to espouse the woman, Anne Stafford, is a marvel to me," said Joshua Longstaffe, the cobbler-politician of the village, voicing the thought that was passing through the minds of most of the bystanders.

"You've found your tongue at last, eh, Joshua?" said Clegg.

"I've been thinking, Reuben. I am not willing, thou seest, to have thee carry off the name of 'Old Thoughtful' without a contest."

"No need to think much to understand yonder marriage, and nobody does; but it's one thing to think in Eyam, and another to say what you think."

"It's cost many a better man than thou his head, Reuben Clegg," said the constable, without his usual circumlocutory flourish.

"The Lady Anne was possessed of a quarter of a million sterling coin of the realm—"

"And the devil to boot," remarked the cobbler.

"Which is enough to make even the devil himself welcome in some households," said Clegg; "and Bradshaw's Presbyterianism wasn't strong enough to resist what you call the other, and at

that price. Besides, and mark you this, if the man loved the woman, what in the name of all you folk hold sacred does it matter to him, whether she believes the Mother of God a more important partner in the heavenly partnership than the Son—”

“Blasphemy!” exclaimed Longstaffe.

“No. Love!” retorted Clegg; “the love that God, as you call Nature, has planted in the human heart, that the world might be worth man’s living in.”

“Profanation!” said Longstaffe.

“Friends, neighbors!” exclaimed Cutts, “all this is beside the mark. What’s it got to do with what we was talking of, the travelers to the Old Hall?”

“Ay, that’s the point,” said Radford. “A queer lot, said you, Master Constable? I never see aught like them out of a Morris dance, and I’d be sorry to meet ’em beyond the gates on a dark night.”

“Hello!” squeaked the tailor, “Master Radford’s serious.”

“Damnation! A man can’t be always bursting of his sides with laughter,” the landlord replied, scowling at Cutts, who sidled up to the constable.

“Let Radford alone,” said Clegg. “He is not so wise as he looks, but he’s handsomer than the Queen of Sheba yonder would think him.”

The crowd sniggered at this, and the constable said you never knew how to take Clegg.

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## CHAPTER NINE

## THE FORESHADOWING OF A COMING EVENT

"Ho, ho! Ha, ha! When thou'st gotten to take Clegg," shouted the landlord, interrupting Dakin's remark humorously, "it'll puzzle thee, Master Dakin, I warrant, more than it did to hale Jasper the Minstrel before the justice."

"Most like," said the constable. "Most like; but if it come in the way of my duty I'd tackle it if the man's name was Goliath and he met me with the sling of David."

"Or the tailor's yard of Cutts," said Clegg; "an' they called him Touchstone, and he met thee with a quip and a quiddity, tempered with blows from a bladder, I doubt me not thou'dst have at him all the same."

"That would I, Master Clegg, and I'd as lief one as the other."

"Liefer, no doubt," said Clegg. "But as for neighbor Radford not caring to meet the strangers within our gates—"

"I said outside," Master Clegg," interrupted the landlord.

"So far as fearing to meet the strangers within or without our gates, I warrant me they are peaceful folk, and they might say the same of us as you, Radford, say of them, if it should have been our lot to travel into their country;

for I tell you that we are accounted no better than cutthroats beyond seas, and I don't know as we are much better, when it becomes our interest to take a purse or a ship, a life or two standing in our way."

"You scoff at me, Master Clegg, but I am free to say, and I say it to thy face, that for an Englishman thou'st gotten the most parlous opinions; and as they favor the devil in one thing, why not in another? That's my delivery, and I stand by it."

The constable unbuttoned his coat as he spoke, and breathed hard; he was angered.

"Thou'rt always so clear and straight in the exposition of thy opinion, Dakin, that it's a pleasure to listen to thee."

"I say thou speakest treason and heresy and schism; and with moderate support, I'd hold it righteous and within the law to make arrest of thee."

Radford's loud laugh was nipped in the bud by the crowd, among whom there were murmurs of encouragement of the constable, and at the same time of sympathy with Clegg, whose hostility to the law excited their admiration, but whose known controversial disposition on the Creeds and the Sacraments of the Church made them fear; for Eyam, though it had been but little disturbed by religious feuds, had traditions of the stake and the gallows. She had been, happily, free of both; but further away the Hundred of the Peak had contributed victims to the animosity of the avowed followers of Christ.

"An thou laid'st thy hand upon me, constable, without warrant, I'd make thy bones rattle. Thou'rt only an ass; it shames me to challenge thee, mentally or physically; I'm but a fool to do it. Get thee gone before I do thee a mischief, with thy prate of treason and heresy. An thy Master Charles is restored, thinkest thou freedom is under his heel, and that such as thou may browbeat honest men? Out of my sight, I tell thee!"

"Nay, but, Master Clegg," said Cutts, in his mild voice, "we be all neighbors, and it befits not that we wrangle here when Master Radford has tapped last March brewing!"

"Ho, ho; ha, ha!" now shouted the landlord, clapping his big hands upon the constable's shoulders and pushing him into the house. "Come along, friends; Mistress Radford and my daughter Jane will serve you with bread and beer, an you so desire, while I put the spigot into as fine a barrel of liquor as ever was supped in Eyam."

The constable made some show of resistance ere his boots crunched the sanded floor of the general room of the Crown and Anchor.

"Won't you come in, Master Clegg?" said Longstaffe, the cobbler, pausing at the door, where Clegg stood mentally upbraiding himself for his exhibition of temper.

"No, Master Longstaffe; I've been fool enough on the doorstep to be likely to improve my manners over Radford's ale."

"What's gone wrong with thee, Clegg? It's

unlike thee to invite a brawl. I hate thy opinions, nay, I lament them; but I respect thy candor and honor thy abilities. If thou didst not blaspheme, I could love thee as a brother."

"That's mortal kind of thee, Master Longstaffe," Clegg replied.

"Thou sayest so with denial in thy heart, Master Clegg; I feel the bite of thy ill-humor, but I forgive thee. Won't come in?"

"Nay, I'll home," said Clegg. "I'm not good company even for myself at times."

"Ah, my friend, if thou'dst let thy mind rest a bit on the saving grace thy mother's found, thou'dst be a happier man."

"Dost think so?"

"I know it."

"And have yonder fools and asses, blethering over Radford's March brewing, got saving grace?"

"Marry, and I hope so, leastwise some."

"My mother has whatever is worth having in this world in the way of peace and love and sweetness, but that comes by Nature; she'd have been the same had she been born in the days when Rome worshiped Flora in the way that Eyam worships Christ over the springs at Ascension."

"Nay, and thou art to be counted among the lost, I fear me, unless it be God's purpose to make a shining example of thy great conversion, or thy great punishment. I'm but a witless creature, Master Clegg, peradventure, with not a tithe of the talents the Master of the Vineyard

hath intrusted to thee; but I would not be in thy present shoes for all the wealth of the Stafford-Bradshaws multiplied by the king's."

"Nay, and if thou art to be counted among the prophets, Joshua, it behooves thee to remember that it was thou who madest my shoes; and I will say this for thy workmanship, that they like me well."

The village cordwainer shook his head mournfully, and disappeared within the portals of the inn.

Clegg betook himself homeward. The wind had risen. It was lifting the fallen leaves and shaking others down from the trees. The rooks protested in harsh cries. Attacked by the wind, their plumage was as ragged as Clegg's reflections. He passed the Manor House without looking at it. It seemed to him as if that strange procession had blurred the image of Mary Talbot.

Was her fate, and his own, threatened in these new arrivals? While Bernardo Roubillae had come over the seas that his wife might fly from the evil influence of a daring and unholy passion, had she brought in her glittering train a danger and a pestilence? Clegg had no divining-rod to probe these secrets of the future; but such love as Clegg's is often blessed, or cursed, with second sight.

Entering the garden-path of his cottage, and looking toward the Dale where the foreign procession had first come into sight, a sudden fear took possession of him. It was one of those moments when an imaginative man might feel as

if the shadow of a cruel fate had passed between him and the sun. He leaned against the great elm that embowered his house, and watched the clouds, through which the evening sun was driving fitful lances, blood red. It appeared to him as if the clouds were being hurried forward by a mighty hand to cover the red reflection; and the wind went storming down the valley with wintry messages.

With all Clegg's learning, one might better say by reason of it, he was superstitious. If he fought clear of what he called the superstition of religion, there were a thousand puzzling things in Nature to fire such an imagination as his, softened as it was and brought into sympathy with the pathos of life by his love for Mary Talbot, the love of a reticent wooer, who kept his secret in his own heart, a strong man who needed some great opportunity to show his love by a heroic sacrifice rather than disclose it and risk the discovery that it was not returned.

"I am all unstrung," he said to himself, "like a broken harp or a faulty hazel-wand. They ask me what is the matter with me. Well, what is? I know not. Why did I pass her door and bend my head? Why did I avert my eyes? What has come over me? . . . To the mystic art of some, and the ardent love of others, the veil of the future has been raised. Is my hand upon the curtain now?"

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## CHAPTER TEN

## THE COMING OF ZILETTO

THE advent of the Italians gave a new and picturesque life to Eyam.

It was the policy of the Stafford-Bradshaws that all possible hostility, political or religious, should be avoided between the Old Hall and the village. Father Castelli was diplomat as well as priest. He had taken the very earliest opportunity to conciliate the local clergy. He was genial and of a benevolent disposition. The late rector, Mr. Stanley, had been inhibited from his office under the Act of Uniformity, and the Rev. William Mompesson advanced to his position. So much bitterness of feeling had been excited in the English Church itself by the expulsion of the Presbyterian clergy and the confiscation of their property and privileges that there was little enthusiasm left on either side, at least in this part of England, for active hostility against the Roman Catholics.

Moreover, the land had been so torn about by rival factions that everybody was anxious for rest, and Father Castelli, as a temporary sojourner, found his lot not altogether unpleasant at the Old Hall. Lady Anne and her husband, soon after the arrival of the Italians, had left for

the South, giving the Old Hall into the hands of their steward, the architect, Father Castelli, and the great painter Bernardo Roubillac.

Once a week at least the foreigners descended upon the village, visiting the few local shops, and doing their best to make acquaintance with the natives. Roubillac, who had begun to learn the language the very day of sailing from Venice, easily made himself understood. Father Castelli spoke English with great facility, and generally accompanied his countryfolk on their wanderings in and about the village.

The foreigners on these occasions made a brave show that in these present days of ugliness in dress might find comparison in theatrical scenes from "Romeo and Juliet" or "The Taming of the Shrew." For though they had modified somewhat to the colder climate their native costumes, both men and women wore the picturesque dress of the Italian city, making the long street of Eyam bright as a pageantry. The native English wore a combination of the costume of the Puritan and the Royalist, that made no poor show of its own. The Restoration was too recent for the ordinary folk to have made much change in their attire, and the more sober villagers who had adhered to Presbyterianism with Mr. Stanley wore their long cloaks and girdles, the Orthodox their buff jerkins and slouched hats, some of them adding a slashed boot and in their hats a stray feather. The miners wore plain leather boots in contradistinction to the few weavers (whose looms could be heard clacking

here and there in the village street) in their breeches, woolen hose, and buckled shoes; while the women of the village mostly affected the close hood and band and ample gown, varied in some cases with the formal ruff; but the younger wives and girls had caught something of the increased freedom of the suggestion of *deshabille* that was observable in the ladies of the Hall, with their glossy hair and ringlets and snowy necks, unveiled by even transparent lawn or collar. The Eyam maidens added the latter, and Mary Talbot frequently donned a buffont or neckerchief. In place of the somber gown gay colors had come in of cloth or satins, which latter, however, were rarely seen except on Sundays; and then only upon a few, for it was not a rich community this village of Eyam, though it had visitors from the outlying settlements and lordly halls that at holiday and festival splashed its street with the color of her finery. Otherwise, but for its trees and gardens, it was a prosaic street; the houses were of stone and thatch, though the Manor House was a fine example of Tudor architecture, as is Eyam Hall to this day, built on the old site, and in something of the old form. Then there was the church with its surrounding foliage, and the green with its fine cross. These features offered varied and effective backgrounds for the picturesquely attired populace, supplemented with the gayer costumes of the strangers from the shores of the Adriatic.

Francesca, the beauty of the Italian colony,

excited the deepest interest among the villagers, who associated her with the Queen of Sheba ever since Clegg had spoken of her in that connection. They had seen nothing so impressive as Francesca. It had not been their lot to witness a play. No vagabond strollers had ever visited Eyam. Some of the elders of the village had seen wonderful pictures in the palaces of the North, representing the Queen of Sheba and King Solomon, the Holy Family, and Cleopatra in her barge, and they discoursed eloquently to the younger people of these wonders, apropos of Francesca, who seemed to them a living realization of the possibility of these, to them, hitherto mythical beings.

And Francesca was happy in her new state. The seas between her and Ziletto, his influence had entirely passed away. He had made no impression upon her heart. The influence he exercised over her was occult, mesmeric, hypnotic. She called it the evil eye, magic, the physical and spiritual power of an evil genius. But from the moment of the flight from Venice his name had never been mentioned. Roubillac, recovering his natural ease of manner, was more solicitous than ever for Francesca's peace of mind, and their lives were as happy as it was possible in what they both conceived to be an exile.

Roubillac became absorbed in his new altarpiece, which of course he could have painted at home even better than here on the spot; but he had other duties. The entire decorative work of the Old Hall was under his direction.

Winter succeeded autumn, and the Italians ceased, for a time, and only came down occasionally into the village. The snow lay thick upon the hills and deep in the valleys. Clegg's fountain was frozen. All the land was desolate. The Winship Mine was still worked, however, and Clegg's heart nourished its ambitious love of Mary Talbot. The village went to bed soon after sunset. The few lights after dark to dot the waste of snow and ice burned in the windows of the Crown and Anchor, the Manor House, and Clegg's cottage. Here Reuben consumed the midnight oil after the work of the day, and stored his mind with such miscellaneous knowledge as the few books he had acquired could afford, and kept, in a corner of his heart, the light of his love for Mary Talbot trimmed with hope and ambition. Mary continued to encourage him and keep him off, and he improved his friendship with Sir George, who, though he was a proud man, maintained a pleasant familiarity with Reuben, reminding his daughter that Clegg was really his partner, and therefore entitled to special consideration. Sir George had voluntarily given Clegg a share of the Winship Mine, in return for his discovery and capable management of the enterprise.

When spring once more smiled upon the land the Italians were again frequently seen in the village. Several of them had attended the village church on Sundays, interested more particularly in the rector's choir, which was chiefly instrumental. Cutts, the tailor, was quite a

master of the violoncello; John Radford played the double bass; Longstaffe led the singing on the violin; Mrs. Mompesson, by her training and encouragement, had developed the few village voices with a good deal of skill, and the effect was altogether new to the foreigners, who had also been greatly charmed at Christmas time by the waits which had broken in upon their slumbers with a jubilant chorus and sent their memories back to their own land of song.

The people of the village treated the strangers with respect, but with something of suspicion, until, with the first spring notes of the thrush, the earliest primroses and the bursting leaves of the lilac, there arrived at Eyam that master of manners, that prince of good fellowship, Giovanni Ziletto, who spoke English with an accent as musical as his voice, who drank with the men at the Crown and Anchor, paid graceful court to all the women, and one night, sitting on the settle in the Crown and Anchor's timbered old house-place, produced a mandolin, and charmed every man there assembled with the fascinating spell of a modern Apollo. His songs were in a strange tongue, but they tuned men's hearts to love and chivalry and new desires. The magic of Ziletto's music seemed almost miraculous. It stole out into the open, drifted along the quiet street, and brought half the village to the doorway and windows of the hostlery. It set the women no longer young thinking of their girlish days. It stirred the fancy of the maidens, as, with new ribbons and holiday rambles, it fore-

casted the coming festival of the Wells, and carried the imagination further down the year to the Wakes, closing the summer with such revelry as had never yet been seen. Mary Talbot, going home from the rectory, where she had been listening to the choir's practice for Sunday, paused to listen, and the weirdly fascinating music haunted her dreams.

Ziletto had entered the village in a traveling carriage from London. The postilions told of frequent relays of horses en route, of roads axle-deep in ruts, of an adventure with robbers. They had an escort, which entered the village ahead of the princely traveler, and these horsemen had been provided with stabling for themselves and their beasts. Ziletto's valet was a mysterious person, in an unfamiliar costume. He smiled in an amused way at the wonder of the natives as the traveler's baggage was unpacked from the depths of the lumbering chariot.

The Crown and Anchor was not endowed with much accommodation for guests. Its resources had been augmented of late, by reason of the improvements at the Old Hall bringing unexpected guests. Lady Anne herself had suggested certain alterations of furniture and house-keeping to Mrs. Radford that had somewhat changed the domestic economy of the inn. Even now, however, it only rejoiced in one best bedroom, the primitive aspect of which had, under the influence of the Old Hall, been considerably modified of late years, more particularly from rushes strewn for guests to a waxed floor with a

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skin or two for the feet, as well as a brocaded coverlet, the gift of Lady Anne, for the great four-post bedstead. The sheets were of home-spun linen, and smelled of lavender. The other furniture consisted of a wide-spreading armchair, a vast press for clothes or linen, a chest with old wrought-iron hinges, and a row of pegs along the wainscoted wall. The long, low bay window, its small square panes sparkling with the evening light that streamed across the wild country, was hung with white dimity curtains. Everything cold as ice in winter—but a week of spring sunshine, the window having a full south aspect, had made the room not only habitable but pleasant. Ziletto declared the chamber was princely; and so it was in those days for a village inn. His man unpacked his ponderous trunks, and with a dainty bit of tapestry and silken cushions here and there, and a couple of mandolins hung upon the pegs, and a gilt-headed walking-staff, and a couple of swords and pistols, a long cross-hafted dagger in a leather sheath, together with sundry picturesque boots and oddly shapen shoes, the room soon took the style and atmosphere of some guest-chamber at Haddon, instead of the humble hostlery of Eyam.

“Yes, my love,” said Sir George, over supper, when Mary Talbot spoke of the music she had heard while passing the Crown and Anchor, “it is the new arrival. He came the day you went to visit my sister Deborah. A remarkable person, another Italian, traveling like a prince, though he is only an artist, one who models

figures, a sculptor, but more than that, a patron of the arts. Brings letters from Lady Anne, has been received by the king, to whom he has given some advice touching the decorations of Hampton Court—at least, so he tells us—and he insists upon taking up his quarters at the Crown and Anchor, though he might, 'tis said, go further afield and be the guest of the right knightly Sir George Manners at Haddon."

"You doubt his credentials then?" said Mary, who understood every tone of her father's voice, and had noted his parenthetical remark of "so he says."

"I do not know. I may have had a passing doubt, because there is something in the fellow's aspect that does not please me."

"Is he like the other Italians at the Old Hall?"

"He is not like anything that I have ever seen out of a pageant in France; though 'tis said the court of our great and good monarch, in these early days of the Restoration, is extravagant in plumes and feathers, and jeweled brocades, and I know not what."

"All of which I thought you approved, dear father. You wear your own doublet and hose with an air—and you become them."

"I am said to be a proud man, Mary; and so I am, in my love of thee, my rose of May."

"You spoil me," said Mary.

"I had like to have come and fetched thee home," said Sir George. "I will never have thee leave me for a whole week together again."

"I should have enjoyed seeing the stranger arrive in his carriage and with his postilions, as my own Margaret tells of, and with outriders; and such a valet—more like an ape than a man, she says—which sets off his master, who is the most beautiful image ever seen out of a picture. And she has seen the chamber at the Crown and Anchor where he is lodged; likewise Radford's great press full of rich costumes, vests and cloaks, and hats and silks, and on the walls swords with jeweled hilts and pistols with ornaments of gold and precious stones."

"Something like the trappings of a mountebank, Mary, and 'tis that I half suspect about him. Nor is he well received by the Old Hall, I hear; but we shall see. Lady Anne Bradshaw is making history for us; she may rival Chatsworth with her paint and stone and marble balustrades, but Haddon will stand forever the gem of the Peak—that is my prophecy, Mary."

"As for me, give me our dear Manor House, father; neither Chatsworth nor Haddon, nor the Old Hall, has sweeter herbs or lovelier flowers, nor cozier rooms, nor more happy memories!"

"My darling child," said Sir George, embracing her, "you say well and eloquently. But you are crying; why, what is the matter?"

"Tears of joy, I think, dear father, to be back again with you; I missed you so much."

"But 'tis unlike you to weep, Mary. You are not well."

"Oh, yes, dear love, I am quite well."

And yet, seeking her chamber for the night.

she wondered why she wept. It was the strange music that had made her weep; it had a painful and pathetic message for her.

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## CHAPTER ELEVEN

### THE MYSTERY OF LOVING

IF one had not known that she had met Ziletto, and he had made no impression upon her except one of curiosity, Mary Talbot's emphatic answer to Mrs. Clegg's appeal, as related in the following chapter, might have been regarded as partly the outcome of the Ziletto influence. But he had passed her in the village street, and remarkable a figure as he was, he had for the moment aroused in her no more than an ordinary interest. He was the new Italian, that was all, except that she noted that he was much more picturesque in his dress than the others, and that he carried himself with an air of authority, as if he conferred a favor upon the community by his presence. His music had gone straight to her heart, and had created a strange commotion there on the previous night, but he had not smitten her at sight, as he had smitten the dove of Venice, Francesca Roubillac.

It was otherwise, however, with Ziletto. Mary Talbot crossed his path, a vision of such beauty as he had never yet encountered; so, at all events, she seemed. Love and passion make their own beauty; but as we have seen, there

was a fresh and peculiar charm about Sir George's daughter. The belle and the pride of Eyam might not be overlooked, even by the most common of mortals. She carried with her a cheerful atmosphere. People felt the better for coming within its circle; it radiated happiness.

Now, Francesca we know was lovely too, and her beauty had given Fame to the altar-piece of San Stefano, but it was the beauty of sighs. It was pathetic; a beauty to wonder at and gaze upon; a something too fine for common uses; a figure for an Oriental throne, to be decorated with gems; and yet Roubillac had caught all that was spirituelle in it, and, giving the raven hair a hue of bronzed gold, had got such contrast of radiant flesh as painter hitherto had rarely won for a sacred canvas.

Ziletto, with this vision of the village beauty in his mind, this first glimpse of Mary Talbot, had a sudden consciousness of these comparisons, and he turned to gaze after the English girl as she swung along the village street, not only a picture of health but a pattern of feminine strength and grace. She carried herself with the freedom of an Egyptian water-carrier.

"Ah, she turns!" he said.

He stood near by the church, watching her as she made her way toward the Delf, upon the edge of which stood Reuben Clegg's cottage.

"The insolent!" she said to herself. "He is standing on the very spot where I passed him, deliberately following me with his wicked eyes."

And Ziletto smiled. She had turned to see if he had noted her unusually. That was how he interpreted her action. She had been prompted to look back down the street, she knew not why; but it annoyed her to find him watching her.

She left the main road and passed into a stretch of grass with a footpath that, winding through a clump of pines, came to an end at Clegg's garden. Entering the rough gateway, she found Mrs. Clegg knitting by the door of the cottage, for though it was early in April the day was warm and sunny. Spring was already busy with the fruit trees and the gillyflowers. The season was unusually early, and Mrs. Clegg had plenty of time to knit and read her Bible, because she rose betimes, and she and her one stalwart servant made short work of the tidying and sweeping and washing that the cottage needed. This, and other domestic details, she confided to Miss Talbot as she welcomed her and gave her the great armchair in which Reuben was wont to sit at nights and talk over the affairs of the day.

"It is so long since I have seen you, Mrs. Clegg, that I felt I must walk round to you this morning."

"That's right; 'tis well said, indeed," the old woman replied. "And will you taste my gooseberry wine? No? Then the elder; nay, 'tis good in a morning. Then let me fasten this nosegay in thy bodice."

She plucked from a great bunch of gillyflowers by the door a few choice sprigs and pinned

them in the bodice of Mary's gown, a rich bit of color that emphasized the whiteness of the girl's round throat. Mary thanked her, with a gracious glance from her deep blue eyes.

"Nay, thou art a bonnie wench—pardon an old woman's admiration—a true blossom of the Peak, and as fresh as a pink, and as unfading as the everlastings that Reuben has given me for a book-mark."

"You are quite gay this morning," said Mary; "I have rarely seen you in such good spirits."

"Thanks to you, my dear. You come so unexpected, like the first sunshine of the spring. And what a lovely time it is, so full of hope. There will be plenty of flowers for the Well-dressing; never such a promise of May that I remember."

Then Mary smoothed her gown, and rested her feet upon the stool which Mrs. Clegg placed for her, and they began to talk of other things; of Mary's visit to her aunt, of the Italians at the Old Hall, the meeting of the Catholic priest and the Rev. William Mompesson quite on civil terms, and the news that Lady Anne contemplated a visit to the Old Hall earlier than had been expected, so deeply interested was she in the progress of the work there; and presently Mrs. Clegg told her how her son had made a new discovery of ore, and had opened up a new lead, and how the Duke of Devonshire had sent a message to him concerning some lands by Hardwicke which he desired him to prospect; and once fairly engaged with Reuben's fortunes, she

deemed the time opportune for the exploitation of interests far deeper to him than all the ore in Derbyshire and all the dukes that might own it.

"Nay, I am right glad thou hast called," said Mrs. Clegg. "I have had something I wanted to say to thee these many months."

"Indeed!" Miss Talbot replied. "I have only been away from Eyam a little more than a week since Christmas, and am but yesterday come home from Aunt Deborah's at East Moor."

"That is quite true, my dear, quite true; but it is only at this moment that I've made up my mind to tell thee what has often been trembling on my lips. Nay, don't look anxious, Miss Talbot."

"You alarm me somewhat," said Mary.

"Nay, sit down. It is about my dear lad, Reuben," Mrs. Clegg replied, placing a seat for her visitor, where Mary could see Middleton Dale winding away to the plain where Reuben and his mother had watched the train of pack-horses and the coming of the Italians who were to exercise such tragical influence upon the peaceful village.

Miss Talbot looked the picture of rosy health; her lips and her complexion that indefinable blend of pink and white that is characteristic of English rural beauty. She looked as if life was a perpetual and unruffled delight to her; a contrast to Mrs. Clegg, whose mild eyes and patient expression of suffering faith were the natural outcome of her Puritanism. She was a slightly-made woman, singularly neat in her attire,

Quaker-like in her cap and gray gown with its plain white apron. On the other hand, there was a certain royalist profligacy of dress and manner in her visitor; not that Mary was extravagantly attired, but she was one of those handsome young women upon whom an extra ribbon or an additional display of head-dress told with almost aggressive effect.

"Nay, thou art a bonny lass," repeated Mrs. Clegg; "and I don't wonder that Reuben is breaking his heart about thee."

"Mrs. Clegg!" said Mary, a quick blush mantling her features.

"Ay, thou dost well to blush; it becomes thee, and it is honorable to thy heart. If there had been any rival to stand in the way, or if thou hadst not been kind to him, and thy father friendly disposed, I do verily believe he would have suffered without so much as breathing a word, even unto me."

"I don't understand you," said Mary.

"Don't you, my dear? Then I will explain myself. My son has a heart of gold, and it is set on thee."

Mary listened, but looked far away in the distance.

"His one great delight for years—ay, for years—has been to live in the same village with thee, to breathe the same air, to talk with thee, to sit now and then at thy father's table, and to come home to me and tell me all thou hast said. to worship thee as if thou hadst been a saint and he one of those godless heathens who kneel and

pray to images. Ay, and I have often warned him that God would punish him, if God were not over-merciful on account of his other virtues; for God is a jealous God, and it is a sin to love overmuch the things of this life."

Here Mrs. Clegg paused, and looked into the girl's face with a questioning glance.

"Yes, I am listening," said Mary, returning the old woman's gaze for the first time; "I am listening."

"Reuben loves thee, my dear Miss Talbot, and would make thee his wife."

Mrs. Clegg rose as she made this declaration, as if she would embrace her daughter that might be; but Mary Talbot made no response, and so the old lady sat down again, her soft, patient eyes, now unusually bright, fixed upon the object of her son's affections.

"Why has not Mr. Clegg told me of this?"

"He was afraid."

"Afraid?"

"That he might lose the privilege of seeing and speaking to thee afterward."

"If I had said, 'Mr. Clegg, I have never thought of you as a lover, and you are old compared with me,' could we then have been no longer neighbors and friends?"

"I cannot tell. But so long as thou hast not said this, so long as he has kept his secret, then he may live and hope. He is not a poor man, Miss Talbot, and one day he may be as rich as thy honored father, if not still richer; and his father was a yeoman, his grandfather a squire,

here in the dale; and we have never, in either of our families, had to blush for an ill-deed or an unneighborly act. My brother died for the king, and my father was a soldier, too."

"I do not dispare your son nor his family, nor yours, dear madam; and my father calls Mr. Clegg friend and partner, as you know."

"And so he is Sir George's partner; but with a right humble regard for Sir George's position, except that he dares to love his daughter. Nay, dear young lady, who could help loving thee, that had a heart in his bosom and eyes in his head? Ay, and don't tell me, dear Miss Talbot, thou hast not seen his worship of thee in his face, his manner, his voice, his humility; for to every other he is proud and willful, to thee meek and gentle; thou mightst tread upon him. Oh, my dear child, be kind to him. He is a good and true man, and never did an unworthy action in all his days."

Overcome with her unusual emotions, Mrs. Clegg drew her apron over her head and wept bitterly.

"My dear Mrs. Clegg—my dear neighbor," said Mary, bending over her, "do not weep; none of us are worthy of such bitter tears. I have never known what it is to have a mother."

"Nay, God help thee, child," said Mrs. Clegg, taking her into her arms. "I wish I might be thy mother."

"Next to my own, I would not desire a more sweet and gentle lady," said Mary; "but oh, dear soul, it may not be, it may not be."

"May not be?" exclaimed Mrs. Clegg, drying her eyes and freeing herself from Mary's embrace, the fervency of which had led her, for the moment, to believe that Reuben's cause was won. "Thou hast a lover that we know not of?"

"I esteem and respect you, Mrs. Clegg, but I deny your right to question me upon such a subject."

"You will deny my son, if he is bold enough to ask for your love?"

"I do not understand such a love as that you speak of. Such love, they say, comes without our will, even without our knowledge, and cannot be mistaken; it has not come to me."

"And yet, one time and another, thou hast seen some of the noblest of our Northern youth."

"Have I? One does not see much in that way, Mrs. Clegg, living all one's days at Eyam. But I am content; I love my father, everybody is kind to me, all the village loves me, there can be no well-dressing without me, no wakes, no Christmas revels; and believe me, it is one of my pleasures to listen to Mr. Clegg talking of wonderful things with my father, and even to hear him wrangle with Mr. Mompesson and Mr. Stanley, the rector that is and the rector that was; but, my dear friend—I could almost call you mother—I do not love your son, and if he asks me if I do that must be my answer."

"O merciful Father!" exclaimed Mrs. Clegg with head bowed. "Help my son to be silent, to suffer and be strong, to find his recompense

in gracious deeds and a loving worship of Thee.”

“Amen!” said Mary, with a sigh, more of relief than reverence; glad to have had this scene with Mrs. Clegg instead of the one which had long been threatened with her son; for Mary liked Reuben, and his undeclared love for her was not displeasing. He was the wisest man in the village, more feared than loved, and Eyam generally being captive to her whims, whatever they might be, it would have been uncomfortable to have had Reuben Clegg beyond her sphere of influence.

“Thou wilt not tell him what I have said to thee?” said the old woman, with a tender note of appeal and disappointment in her voice.

“If you do not wish it.”

“It will make no difference to thy treatment of him?”

“I will endeavor to forget it.”

“Nay, don’t forget it. Let it be our secret; let it be a token between us—a tie of more than neighborship, a something that may one day bear fruit. I cannot bear to carry such a burden all alone; and who knows, one day thou mayst come to me and say, ‘Mrs. Clegg, dear friend, be my mother in good sooth,’ and the joy of it would be a link back to this day.”

“I have never yet had a secret to keep, dear Mrs. Clegg. I hope it will not out one day!”

“If ’twould out in the right way, my child, eh? If thou only knew his great heart, his trueness, his—”

“Oh, but I know how good he is, Mrs. Clegg; and I don’t regard myself worthy of so much devotion.”

“Then thou dost not deem thy family a bar against him?”

“I think of him as an equal in that respect.”

“Nay, that is a step toward love; for thy father is proud of his descent and his ’scutcheon.”

“And I am proud, too, Mrs. Clegg. But your son is of the mettle that makes British heroes. I think of him as one should think of the men one reads of in books, who begin humbly, perhaps as shepherds, and are selected for rulers of the State. Nay, there, I can say no more, or you will have me justifying my father’s frequent protest, that I am too romantic, that I look upon life as a story-book. And last night, as I was going home from the rectory, I heard such music stealing out from the garden of the inn that I could almost have believed the Crown and Anchor was enchanted ground, and all the village under a spell, for it seemed they were mostly assembled there; and my father tells me it is a new-comer; an Italian who speaks our tongue as well as his own, an artist interested in the work at the Old Hall, but whom Sir George suspects to be a spy in the land; though what can he want to spy about here?”

“The foreign folk at the Old Hall, belike, are here for no good. ’Tis known they hold strange worship in the new chapel that Lady Anne has built; and the one they call Roubillac—he of the sallow face and furtive look, the husband of the

gypsy woman with the jeweled robes—'tis said he is painting an unseemly picture, which they will worship when 'tis finished. And I fear me, no good can come of all this, and 'twere better the Old Hall had been pulled down than harbor such things."

"But, dear Mrs. Clegg, the coming of the strangers has been good for Eyam and all the country side; employing our labor, distributing good money among the poor, and, moreover, even Mr. Mompesson is willing to admit that they bring to us a beautiful art. Besides, Eyam is to rival Chatsworth, at least the Old Hall is; and it is not because a thing is beautiful that it is unholy."

"Nay, God forbid!" said Mrs. Clegg, taking the girl's glowing face in her bony hands and kissing her forehead. "God forbid; for thou art beautiful!"

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## CHAPTER TWELVE

### "THE WORLD IS A MASKED BALL"

WHEN Ziletto, the Italian, set foot in Eyam, the village may be said to have been almost an earthly paradise. The feeling that had been aroused by the expulsion of the Rev. George Stanley from the rectorship and the appointment of the Rev. William Mompesson had cooled down. Mr. Mompesson was beginning to make his way with his new flock. Mr. Stanley re-

mained among his friends; he said he was too old to seek new ones, too old to go forth into the world. Moreover, he loved Eyam, and carried the cross of his political martyrdom with a dignified contentment.

The active feuds of Roundhead and Royalist, which had made considerable stir in the High Peak Hundred, had not excited Eyam very much. Everybody was the happier that things were settled. Presbyterians knew the worst, and Conformists were not inclined to vaunt themselves on their victory. The previous autumn season had been bountiful, so far as the few crops of the district were concerned, and the winter store of cured beef and bacon unusually abundant.

Upon this prosperity had come additional employment of labor at the Old Hall, the advent of the Italians, an increased output of lead at the Winship Mine, and an unusually mild and early spring. Mary Talbot was as happy as she was beautiful. Reuben Clegg had not yet steeped his mind in the pessimism of unbelief and become more or less of a recluse, still nursing, however, his secret love for Mary. Bernardo Roubillac had found the Old Hall a blissful retreat in which he could exercise his art and cultivate the domestic virtues safe from the intrusion of the only man in all the world who seemed to have power to shadow his life. Francesca had entirely recovered from the morbid attitude she had assumed toward the man Ziletto, and with the spring sunshine, the pure, bracing air, the

cheerful river that wound through the woods and moorlands below her window, the new interests that surrounded her, she was full of healthful spirit, and looked forward to a better acquaintance with the villagers and to the forthcoming Ascension festival. All the little world of the mountain village was sunny, in fact and in fancy, when Ziletto came.

Every paradise must have its serpent, every sunny beam its shadow. Heaven itself is not free from the intrigues of Satan, and the splendor of the revolting angel has inspired one of the noblest poems in the language.

Ziletto was the serpent of our village paradise, as he had been the reptile of Roubillac's Eden at Venice. It seemed as if it might be specially said of him that while he was made in God's own image, he had the soul of a fiend. He might have sat for an Apollo. His figure was a superb example of masculine perfection. This was better seen in the costume he affected in Italy, though it was not altogether disguised in his semi-English dress, which he carried with the grace of Charles, the king, himself. His eyes were dark as night, and sometimes as reposeful, while at others they were keenly alert in their watchfulness. His manner toward women was soft and deferential, as it was, on occasions, scoffing and defiant toward men. At the same time there was something in his smile, something in his assumption of frankness and bonhomie, that invited confidence and seemed worthy of it. He knew how to assume a virtue

if he did not possess it, and he wore the mask of honesty with the ease of a practiced actor, only laying it aside when he sat in council with Pedro, his valet, or in open defiance of a foe or when meeting an opponent on the field of honor.

No one could be charged with blindness who failed to discern the face behind the mask, the wolf beneath the sheep's clothing in Ziletto's case. It was hard even for Father Castelli to believe that so eminently fair an example of manly grace could be linked to a nature so vile; but Father Castelli was a man of charity, and he only believed one-half the evil things that were laid to the account of Ziletto. Some of them, he thought, might probably be due to the human weakness of envy; for Ziletto had many accomplishments besides the attraction of his appearance and his charm of manner to excite both envy and jealousy. •

Mary Talbot did not gauge the stranger on any of these lines. She did not think of him as evil or good; indeed, she thought of no one as evil; she took the good in people for granted, and her experience of the little world of the High Peak Hundred was in favor of the angelic side of humanity. The indifference she affected to feel on first seeing Ziletto was an instinctive resistance. That she had turned to look at him had not escaped Ziletto. He was too well acquainted with women not to understand the glance of curiosity and interest that had passed between them as he moved aside to let her go by, near the wall that shut in the garden of the

Manor House and joined the green hedge of thorn and privet beyond. His natural egotism was not necessary to interpret the surprise his appearance must have excited in her mind, notwithstanding the presence in the village of his compatriots. His unaffected glance of admiration remained with her. She could not shake it off. His face had come into her mind even while Mrs. Clegg was pleading the cause of her son. The thought of it annoyed her; but this was on account of her pride, which she had herself wounded by her own curiosity. It troubled her to think how the stranger might regard her, knowing that she had assuredly turned to see if he had gone on his way, only to find him still gazing after her. He might look upon it as a challenge to further acquaintance. So, for her own thoughtlessness or indiscretion, she was angry with him, whoever he might be; and surely he was a person of distinction—a foreigner certainly, an Italian no doubt, but how utterly unlike the others!

That night she inquired of her woman, Dobbs, who and what the man might be; and Dobbs was primed with all kinds of news for her, for Mr. Vicars, the tailor, was her cousin, and he was quite wild in his admiration of the stranger's costumes. He had seen them. Mrs. Radford had opened the press for him, and shown his best suits to him; and the stranger's valet, a very dark-eyed, scowling kind of being, who started up in all kinds of places when least you expected him, had permitted Mr. Vicars to take

the pattern of a doublet and hose that was a wonder of style and embroidery. Nor was all the work Italian. Most of the costumes had been cut in London by the king's own tailor, though others were Venetian; and Dobbs was of opinion that if any man who was not English, and more especially Derbyshire, could be formed to catch the eye of an honest woman, this stranger with the Z in his name was that man; a fine figure, eyes that went all-over-you-like in a pleasant way, and a manner—well, it might be too much of the dancing-master who had given Miss Talbot lessons, coming all the way from Hallamshire once a month. For that, however, he might be forgiven, being a foreigner; and as for his singing, it was like nothing on earth or heaven that she had ever heard—not that she could speak of heaven, of course, but it had a way of making you “feel as if you was dreaming.” Twice, while Miss Talbot was at her aunt's, she had sat in Mrs. Radford's brewhouse and heard him; and what was extraordinary was that he had condescended to play his fiddle, or whatever it might be, and sing to it, for the edification of the company; and some said he was a prince in disguise on his travels—what Vicars calls a troubadour. It was just wonderful; and that was the only word she could find for it.

Mary had sat and listened to this remarkable gossip while Dobbs was brushing her hair and binding it up for the night. Whenever Dobbs paused, as if her story were at an end, Mary

plied her with some new question; and in her dreams she heard the music that had bewitched the village and was conscious of the glance that seemed to have bewitched her. Not that she was a stranger to the admiration of the opposite sex; she was quite conscious of the furtive and timid glances of the few young men of Eyam who had the courage to look her in the face. She knew that at church they were often contemplating her over their books, and when, during one or two visits of Lady Stafford, the company at church had included men not accustomed to disguise their admiration of a pretty woman, and they had cast significant looks at her, she had been quite equal to the occasion, proud, defiant, and conscious of the protection of a proud old father, who would just as soon have flung out upon them with his rapier as look at them if any question of disrespect to his daughter had arisen. She was heart-whole, knew that she was pretty, but knew it with an unconscious sense of the dignity of her innocence. It was as if she looked upon herself as representative of the credit and reputation of the Talbots, the daughter of a mother who was beautiful—as any one could see by the fine portrait that hung in the Manor House dining-room—and the Lady Bountiful of the village; and yet she had blushed hot when, turning in the road, she knew that this stranger had been watching her.

On the next day, when she was walking along the street in company with the rector's wife, and the stranger had doffed his hat to Mrs. Mom-

peyson, and in a deferential manner had included her in his salutation, she felt her heart beat, and she knew that she had become hot and cold all in a minute, and feared that Mrs. Mompesson must have noted her confusion. In this, however, she was mistaken. Mrs. Mompesson was a woman of a delicate and sensitive nature, and she had simply remarked that Eyam was becoming quite a foreign village, and that this Signor Ziletto was certainly the most interesting of all their artistic visitors. Mr. Mompesson had said the same, and expressed the belief that Miss Talbot would find the newcomer interesting. The rector having called upon him, being a stranger, the signor had responded forthwith, and they had found him quite a desirable acquaintance. It was a tribute to his kindly nature that the children had taken to him wonderfully; a sure sign, the rector said, of a good heart.

The next day was Sunday, and when the Crown and Anchor's distinguished guest, the observed of all observers, entered the church, Sir George Talbot, with the customary courtesy of the chief man in the parish and Mr. Mompesson's most influential parishioner, stepped from his pew and politely motioned the signor to a seat therein.

It was a new feather in Ziletto's cap that he understood the prayer book, making it quite clear to all that the foreigner was a Protestant. His compatriots had, on a special occasion, attended a service at Christmas-time, but they

were quite strangers to the ceremonial and form of worship, and had rather scandalized some of the congregation by crossing themselves on entering and leaving the church. If the villagers had not already been torn by factious controversy, and put a little out of conceit with religion, as Radford and Vicars had admitted, it is possible that the presence of members of the Romish Church might have been resented; even though it was understood that they were but sojourners in the village for the purposes of their calling, and had the right to indulge their own habits and customs, being there, as the constable had said, not of their own accord, but by virtue of invitation and trade, and attended by their own clergyman, who did not attempt to proselytize, and was, for a priest and son of Baal, not a bad sort of a creature.

Conscious of her unusual blush and that unusual flutter of the heart which had troubled her for the first time in her young life on seeing the stranger, Mary Talbot made a strong demand upon her native dignity, and comported herself with so near an approach to her natural ease of manner that she betrayed no self-consciousness either to Ziletto or her father. And when she laid her arm upon her father's and left the church after the benediction, she carried herself with unusual prescience, and never once deigned to look toward the stranger, who, with a courtier-like sweep of his feathered hat in the porch, took the way to his inn. He had hesitated for a moment, as if he expected Sir George to speak

to him; and probably Sir George would have done so, but he felt a significant pressure on his arm and went his way homeward, Mary's gown making a rustle of silk and giving forth a sweet perfume of lavender that, to her many furtive and secret worshipers, was like an odor of sanctity about the figure of a saint. And yet there was not a man or woman in all Eyam who did not bow or curtsy to her, and not a house in which, at one time or another, she had not been a visitor either in the way of charity or neighborliness. If she had posed as a saint she would have been the merriest and most cheerful of all the saints that had ever been inscribed in the calendar; but so bashful is the love that admires and reverences, no youth or squire or yeoman's son, or even the titled nobility that came into Eyam for the village festivals, had ever dared to do more than favor themselves and Mary with a sly, half-averted, apologetic glance, "and no bones broken," as the constable said, wondering why the lads were all afraid of her; and not alone the lads, as he remarked to Mrs. Constable, but that great hulking, over-masterful, censorious Reuben Clegg, with his sneering ways and rabid tongue—even he dared not whisper to himself the awkward fact that he was head and heels and boots and all in love with Sir George's daughter.

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## CHAPTER THIRTEEN

## THE LOVE THAT LASTS

WHICH was all quite true, as we have seen. Clegg was a strong man in all other things, but Love was stronger than Clegg. He fought it with every weapon he knew.

In the daytime, among his miners, he labored like the rest, hewing the ore or superintending its tedious transit to the highway, that was not a highway as we know the roads of to-day, but a mere track that passed over moorland and through woods in lanes of wagon ruts perilous to axles and destructive of all human patience. But nothing in the way of his work put Clegg out, and he was used to battle with Nature.

It was only when he came into intellectual contact with certain of the men of Eyam that his temper got beyond control, as it had done, indeed, in little wayside controversies with the two clergymen of the parish, Messrs. Mompesson and Stanley; but it was all through his love for Mary Talbot. If this could have been satisfied, there would have been no more meek and gentle inhabitant of the whole great land of the Peak than Reuben Clegg. Without the smallest prospect of this, he nevertheless dedicated his life to Sir George's daughter. It was for her sake that he had helped to make her father rich; for her

sake that he carried his divining-rod hither and thither; for her sake that he augmented the output of the Winship Mine, that Sir George might the better administer to her fancies and endow her with fine clothes and gemmed necklaces; for her sake that he pored over the lore of sages whom he only half understood; for her sake that he sat o' nights watching the stars and studying their mysteries; for her sake that he was gentle with his mother, never gave her a sorry word, day or night—and was she not a woman, besides being his mother? For the sake of one rustling petticoat of the Manor House, and one sweet voice, he was kind to all women, lovable to all children, though churlish to some men; just, in a measure, the counterpart in his virtue to Ziletto in his vice.

Clegg found his chief happiness in communing with Nature. If he did not carve her name on trees, as Orlando did, he confided his love to them, his hopes and joys. The great hulking beggar, as the constable called him, would lay him down in the grass or sit by the Derwent, or stand with his face against some favorite tree, and feel happy with Nature, that neither lied to him, nor flattered him, nor feared him, but was always the same frank companion, and had yielded up many a secret to him, voluntarily and perforce; never chary of response to his love, nor even jealous of his passion for another.

He had great hands and feet, this man Clegg, and an ungainly habit of manner, walking with a swinging gait, and speaking with a dialect that

was thick as his boots; but he had great gray thoughtful eyes, and a mouth that was delicate in its lines, though suggestive of strength of will and purpose, and he had a well-shaped nose and compact forehead. He looked everybody straight in the face—everybody except Mary Talbot. His eyes fell before hers and his voice softened and his gesture became humble. He was afraid of Mary, and she knew it and was kind to him, and now and then succeeded by her complaisance so far as to get him to talk with something of unconstraint; but the moment the subject of their discourse wavered in its point, the moment it ceased to take him out of himself, he became self-conscious.

What would he have said if he had known what had transpired between Mary and his mother? It is hard to say. Seriously as she had pledged Mary to secrecy, Mrs. Clegg was often tempted to say something of it to her son, for she could not help but feel that if Reuben really wooed the girl with courage, “put his best leg foremost,” to use her homely phrase, donned his Sunday clothes continually, brushed his soft brown beard with care, gave the brim of his hat an extra droop and stuck a feather in it, he might compete with the handsomest. She would actually have decked him out thus, and brought him into the common run of men, the dear old dame, touched by the finery of Mary’s ribbons and wondering, if Reuben made himself smart and polished, whether he would not the better strike the girl’s fancy.

What Mrs. Clegg feared was that one of the gay young squires or townsmen from some distant place in Hallamshire, or some visitor at the Old Hall, would step in between Reuben and his hopes, and capture the girl before she had had a fair, honest opportunity of saying "Yes" or "No" to her son; and this, she feared, might break his heart—the idea of which would have amused the strong men who knew Reuben, and who had no idea of the capacity of a girl to upset a man of his strength of mind and body. It was known that Clegg had feathered his nest, and could, if he had chosen, have bought a girl with solid gold, just as they thought the men who called themselves his betters did when they fancied a man's daughter, and went to him with the price of her in money or lands, in jewels and gems and other finery, or winning her by his persistency and his courage, as John Manners had won Dorothy Vernon, in spite of her hectoring father, the King of the Peak.

But so it was. Reuben Clegg, in presence of a certain petticoat, was the veriest coward that ever posed unconsciously as an example of the power of love.

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## CHAPTER FOURTEEN

### IN THE DAYS OF HER INNOCENCE

SIR GEORGE had met Ziletto out riding, and had come to the conclusion that any man who

could sit a horse as the Italian sat Radford's awkward mare must be a gentleman. "Sat her," as he told his fellow justice of the peace, who lived some miles away, and was rarely seen in Eyam, "by Jove! sir, as if she were the finest blood in the county, and saluted me with the air of a prince, by Jupiter! And I could not help reining up and complimenting him. Why, the fellow must be a prince in disguise, as the constable says."

And when Sir George came home, and Mary insisted upon helping him off with his velvet jerkin, while his man drew off his boots, he could talk of no one but this Signor Ziletto.

"Rides like my old general, upright as a May-pole, but all the same graceful as a willow. He put that old hack of Radford's at the brook down by the glen yonder, and carried her across by main force, and the mare went as if the devil was behind her. Never saw such a feat since Mellish took Lover's Leap—which I didn't see, for that matter—and I've invited the fellow to have dinner with us. Do you mind sweetheart? Have I done the right thing, little housekeeper?"

"Oh, yes, father. You always do the right thing."

"Do I, my bundle of good nature; do I?"

"You know you do, when it is your heart that prompts you."

"Well, do you know, darling, my heart was against the fellow at first. I felt as if I could not endure the beggar when Mompesson intro-

duced him to me. But there, you know I'm prejudiced against foreigners. Mompesson is taken with him; but a snatch of learning, a bit of travel, a phrase or two about the arts of Greece and Rome, captures a mind like Mompesson's; and he don't get much communion of thought in that way in these hills, eh?"

"I suppose not," said Mary.

"If we are not to be envied for our learning in the Peak, at least we have the gift of hospitality."

"We have not shown much," said Mary, smiling, "to the foreigners at the Old Hall."

"They have not courted it, Mary; and I don't know that the severe-looking gentleman in the queer cloak and with the long face is an inviting subject; though, by my halidame, as your aunt hath it, madame, his wife, is a fine specimen of Nature's handiwork, that is, if she did not favor the gypsy so much. Moreover, neither Lady Stafford nor the Bradshaws have intimated that these people are more than skilled working folk; but this new comer, with his fine manners and his royal plume, is of a high breeding, and honors the Hundred, finding it worthy of a long visit, for they say he is making Radford's cartshed into a studio, and Mompesson tells me he has asked permission to design the decoration for the manor spring, and offers to complete it at his own cost."

"He is a painter, then, similar to the others?"

"No, a sculptor; but it is not his vocation, except by his own favor, as it were; he is rather

a patron than an artist, and when he works it is for the love of it."

"You are well-informed in his history, father," said Mary, attending to some trifling household duties, as she listened and drew Sir George out on the topic that became more and more of interest to her.

"Nay, he talks to Mompesson, and I looked in on Vicars, the tailor, to have a lace mended, and he was brimming over with accounts of the stranger's generosity, his marvelous knowledge, and the fancy the foreigner hath taken to Eyam and the country round about; praises the Dale of Middleton, sees something we none of us have seen in the aspect of Froggatt's Edge, and pronounces the Derwent a stream in a thousand. You approve of his coming to have dinner with us?"

"Oh, yes; I think it is most thoughtful of you, and kind. Don't you think you might ask Mr. Reuben Clegg also?" said Mary. "He is the only neighbor, except Mr. Mompesson, who is learned and has opinions."

"Ask Clegg," said Sir George, in his breeziest manner; "why not?"

"I see no reason," said Mary; "he and Mr. Mompesson don't always agree; it would make quite a good company to ask Mr. Stanley also."

"Now you are in jest, Mary; though I don't see why Stanley and Mompesson should not be good friends."

"If religion were that true thing they preach about, they would be," the girl replied.

"You are expressing the sentiments of Clegg," said Sir George; "but you often pay 'Old Thoughtful' that kind of compliment."

"Do I? You shouldn't call him 'Old Thoughtful'; it is a nickname."

"Then I will only call him Mr. Clegg. But what a Solomon he is, to be sure. He couldn't have had a nickname more like his character. They used to call Stanley 'Old Tub-thumper,' you know; and he did bang the desk sometimes when he was preaching, did he not? Do you know what they call Dakin the constable? 'Old Wait-a-bit!' How he hates Clegg! It's worse to be made fun of than to be smitten with a cudgel. Clegg makes Dakin squirm. While you were at your aunt's there was a case of trespass the constable brought before me; Clegg was a witness; and it was as good as Punch and Judy at the Wakes to hear Reuben and the constable arguing."

"You don't often hold your court, now, father."

"No, my dear; we are a happy and law-abiding community, and I am thankful for it; though I would not mind having such a case as the assault and trespass no bones broken, as the constable says, and no committal, to have the pleasure of setting Clegg and Dakin at each other; a couple of game cocks, with spurs that don't draw blood, but rankle mightily, I am afraid. I managed to soften Clegg to the other when it was all over; Clegg shook hands with the constable, and everybody concerned went to the

Crown and Anchor afterward. And I do verily believe I will invite Clegg to dinner with the stranger, and Master and Mistress Mompesson. You must ask Clegg to tell you all about Dakin's ideas of rights of way and what constitutes an assault and battery in the eyes of the law."

There was a certain sobriety of tone and cut in Mary Talbot's dress that heightened her type of beauty. Not that she adhered altogether to the quiet fashion of the time; she modified its plainness with a ribbon or a brooch, and the mounting of her feather fan, and there was above all the whiteness of her neck, the ruddy healthfulness of her complexion, her wealth of rich brown hair, and her gay and cheerful manner.

"I cannot tell you how much I have missed you, Mary, all this week," Sir George suddenly exclaimed, taking her into his arms and kissing her. "What should I do without you, if some day you took it into your fantastic little head to get married?"

"But I never shall, dear," she said. "Never, never, never."

"I verily believe I should hate the fellow," said Sir George, laughing.

"No, dear, you would not, if I loved him. But why anticipate misfortune?" she replied, laughing in her turn. "Aunt Deborah says one had better be buried than married."

"Ah, she's no authority," answered Sir George. "I don't recall that anybody ever proposed to make Deborah his partner in life,

though a man might have gone further and fared the worse."

"The dear old lady; what a shame!" said Mary. "But 'nobody has axed me, sir, she said—sir, she said!'"

"They've got to face me first, my dear," said Sir George; "and they know I'd cudgel them. I never told you that young Maynard had the audacity to sound me on the subject, as he called it."

"No; of a truth?"

"Ay, of a truth, Mary."

"And did you cudgel him?"

"With a frown and a 'devil-take-it, sir,' and I know not what," said Sir George, breaking out into a loud guffaw. "And you should have seen the fellow."

"Was he so frightened?"

"That was he, indeed."

"Then he's not for me, Sir George," said Mary, with a theatrical toss of her head. "The man who marries me must brave the world for me—father, friends, country."

"Tut! tut! thou hast been reading a romance," said Sir George, soberly.

"Yes, a romance; I did but jest, love."

"You would never defy your father, Mary?"

"What? Like my Lady Manners of Haddon? Steal from home and hide away in the dark. and—"

"Having had the fellow lurking about in the woods like a poaching outlaw, and with her consent, the hussy!" said Sir George, indignantly.

"It was an act of shame, indeed," said Mary; "though 'twas like a romance set forth in cantos."

"A romance!" exclaimed Sir George. "An abduction; a lawless outrage, Mary; and who would have thought it, for she had hitherto been a dutiful child, honored her father and her mother, and—"

"I have heard you say that her father was haughty; overbearing; a tyrant, indeed; and to none more so than his own flesh and blood."

"And so am I," said Sir George. "I am a tyrant."

"A very honey-sweet tyrant," said Mary; "and everybody knows it—strong of head and soft of heart."

"'Strong i' the arm an' weak i' the head,' is the proverb," said Sir George; "and by the mass, I sometimes think it's true."

"When don't you think it's true, sir?" Mary asked. "When you think of those Italians, I suppose."

"Nay, confound them, I don't compare our men with such, nor our women either. When strength drifts into paint-pots and making pictures, it's a poor business, after all. I suspect it was Staffordshire or Yorkshire that made the proverb about Derbyshire out of pique for a beating we gave them some time or other, and while they could not deny the strength of our arm they flung at us the sneer about our head."

"Then you don't believe the proverb?"

"No, I don't. I think we are as good as our

neighbors and a little better; and if one was put to it for evidence, I don't know that old Bess of Hardwicke, among women, could be bettered as to a Derbyshire head; and to come to men in our own day, what do you say to Clegg?"

"A man in a thousand," said Mary.

"You think so?"

"Yes," said Mary.

"You do?" said Sir George, pulling her upon his knee; "you do, in very truth?"

"Yes," she said, "in very truth."

"I sometimes think it is a pity Clegg is not a gentleman," said Sir George, kissing his daughter's fair hand.

"But is he not a gentleman?" Mary asked, her voice dropping a little anxiously, for it occurred to her all in a moment that perhaps Mrs. Clegg had been saying something to her father about Reuben, or that Clegg himself might have spoken to him on the delicate subject that his mother had mentioned to her so keenly.

"Oh yes, at heart, but not by birth; if he had been, who knows?—But there, that is a matter that will keep. Do you know, my love, while I think I should, as I have said, hate the man who took you from me, I remember now and then, as I ought, that I am getting on in years, and that some day you will need another protector and companion, and—"

"Very well, dear; when my John Manners, or the prince on the white horse, comes, we will talk about it; but not now, dear, not now," said Mary, taking the ruddy genial face of Sir George

between her dimpled generous hands and kissing him on both cheeks. "When is our company to come to dinner?"

"When? To-morrow shall it be?"

"Yes. I will go and ask the Mompessons; you shall call and engage Mr. Clegg and the Italian—let me see, what is his name?—Ziletto?"

"Signor Giovanni Ziletto," said Sir George; "and I will lay you a wager of what you will that Clegg hates him."

Sir George swore "by the mass," and had other harmless oaths. Even to this day, without a thought of its origin, Derbyshire men swear by the Virgin. They vow "by-mi-leddy"; though Sir George had reason for his habit, seeing that his ancestors were Roman Catholics to a man. "And are true Catholics now," he would say; "it is the others that have gone astray." But he was tolerant and broad minded, and Mary had unconsciously imbibed some of the ultra-liberal sentiments of Clegg. She was not jesting in the least when she named Mr. Stanley for a guest. He had been the rector, and might have been still, if he had chosen to take the oath of Conformity; and though he was outside the Orthodox pale, he still remained in the village and ministered to many of his old former flock, even to some of those who still went to church and obeyed the authority of the State.

They were a very companionable couple, you see, this father and daughter. There came a time when the villagers said Mary had always been too free with religion and too indifferent to

the common usages; but hitherto, no love or interest or question of any kind had come between Sir George and his daughter's confidence and affection. No gallant, lover or otherwise, had as yet disturbed her relations with home. Reuben Clegg, in spite of himself, had secret desires of sharing Mary's heart with her brave old father, but it was only his doting mother that kept his little lamp of love fairly alight.

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## CHAPTER FIFTEEN

### VISIONS OF BEAUTY AND A SHADOW

WHILE Sir George Talbot and his daughter were discussing Ziletto at the Manor House in the village, Father Castelli and Roubillac were similarly engaged in the priest's room at the Old Hall.

It was an odd quadrangular apartment which the priest occupied, with an adjoining room not much larger than the carved four-post bed on which he slept, a grim-looking arrangement compared with modern notions; it had heavy hangings and a canopy, the complete arrangement suggestive rather of a catafalque than a bed for a living sleeper. The room that served for his study and parlor was paneled in oak, with a couple of heavy beams supporting the ceiling, each decorated with a corbel, carved by some humorist who had composed a quartet of

heads with facial expressions probably signifying Spring, Summer, Autumn and Winter, two of them bursting with laughter at the others.

In front of a small altar there was a low bench, constructed after the manner of the chair we know as a prie-Dieu; and the other furniture consisted of a heavy square table, with a few parchment-bound books and manuscripts thereon, an oak seat, that was also a chest for clothes, and a couple of high-backed chairs.

On the walls hung a quaint-looking map of Italy and a chart of England. The floor was bare, with the exception of a rush mat by the table, and the sun streamed in from a diamond-paned window, let so deep into the wall that the sill almost made a seat, though a high one, and it was decorated with a great jar of blue iris.

The occupants of the room became it well. Father Castelli, with his ascetic shaven face and his monkish gown, looked little more the priest than Roubillac in his customary robe, redeemed, however, from its somber hue and dark fur by the embroidered vest and chain of gold that he wore about his neck. It was a noble face, though lacking in what would be called strength; the face of a man of suppressed feeling; the face of a poet, with steadfast eyes that seemed pre-occupied with some other subject than that he was discussing, and yet his very heart and soul were in the theme.

"He can only have one object in coming here," he said, addressing the priest, his back against the wainscot by the window, his figure in shadow

except when, once in a way, he turned to gaze upon the landscape, as if he sought something there or that he was trying to collect his thoughts.

They spoke in their own melodious language, their voices at one time seeming to make a cooing music, and at another to rise into tones of storm and threatening.

"He denies that he has any malicious or unholy feeling toward either of you; declares that he had long since made up his mind to travel in England, even before you met in Venice. He says it is his business in these regions to study archæology and the barbaric art of the feudal halls and castles of the North of Britain. It was while making his way to Haddon and Chatsworth and Peveril's Castle that he stumbled upon Eyam by accident, and—"

"He lies, father—he lies!" exclaimed Roubillac.

"It may be so," the priest replied, "but he lies with all the circumstance of truth. He came hither from London, and brings letters from the court; would be welcomed at the stately hall of Haddon, but he finds new and strange attraction in the village life of Eyam; affects to be taken with its restfulness, and is transforming a shed of the inn to the purposes of a studio."

"Then some unhappy woman has had the misfortune to inspire his lust," said Roubillac, scornfully.

"Nay, my son," replied the priest, "they love their women, these northern islanders, and are a proud race. It would go hard with Ziletto if

he should seek to amuse himself here, as he is credited with doing in Venice—the profligate!”

“It should have gone hard with him in Venice if the devil had not more power there than the Church,” said Roubillac, bitterly.

“Vengeance neither belongs to man nor the Church,” the priest answered.

“The Church has invoked the ax and the brand on many a quivering subject, nevertheless,” said Roubillac.

“Under God, and by His command,” said the priest. “Thou art profane, Roubillac, my son. I forgive thee, because thou art in distress of mind!”

“What is it that moves you so grievously, father?” said the soft voice of a beautiful woman, standing in the doorway. She had entered upon the scene so silently that she might have been a vision.

“You here, my love!” said Roubillac, advancing toward her and taking her hand.

“I was seeking you,” said Francesca, her dark eyes resting upon the face of Roubillac. “They told me you had walked this way.”

“We are right glad you have come,” said the priest, rising. “Nay, daughter, be seated. We were just talking of you.”

“What, in so sad a strain?” she said, smiling. “And I felt so happy. The sun is so warm, yet the air is crisp and sets one’s spirits dancing.”

“It is indeed a rare day,” said Roubillac, endeavoring to respond to the cheerfulness of his wife,

"Then why were you sad?"

"I don't think we were sad," said the priest. "Perhaps a little anxious, but the shadow has passed with the sunshine of thy presence. Come, sit, and make us feel at home."

Francesca, arranging her demi-toilet robe in artistic folds, sat in the high-backed chair which the priest indicated, and Roubillac placed for her a rush hassock as a footstool. She sat as upon a throne, and looked a queen. From beneath her apple-green skirt of satin peeped forth two pretty feet, in white morocco shoes with high heels.

"Now, my son, where are thy easel, thy palette, and thy brushes? Were it not a vanity to say so, it is long since I saw so dainty a study—nay, understand, I speak with the painter's eye," said the priest, still anxious to turn the woman's thoughts from the point of wondering what they were discussing when she had surprised them.

"Peace, dear father," replied the lady, raising a fair white finger by way of protest. "I am weary of posing."

"Then you shall set up your own easel and I will pose for you," said Roubillac, "as the tyrant who enslaved the fairest maid of Venice."

"I did but jest, Bernardo. You spoil me. So do you. Father Castelli, I am too happy!"

"You no longer despise your new home?" said the priest.

"Did I despise it?" she said, with an apologetic smile. "Ah, it was so cold and bleak!"

"Not more so, my daughter, than our own dear Venice in December."

"I love Venice!" she said, with a languishing glance at the window.

"Then we will go hence, dear heart, back to our own home by the sea. It was in our thoughts when you sought us."

"Nay, my son," said the priest.

"But it was, dear father, it was!" said Roubillac.

"I do not desire to go hence; and if I did, 'twould not be before the Feast of Ascension, the decoration of the springs; and, moreover, thou art to design the chief offering to Flora," said Francesca, with animation, the color mounting into her olive complexion.

A pang of jealous fear shot through Roubillac's brain as he noted the sudden light in her eyes, which rarely betrayed the emotion of pleasure except when Venice or Verona was in question. Father Castelli had assured Roubillac that Ziletto had not yet seen Francesca, either at the Old Hall or in the village. Watching the animation of his wife, Roubillac nevertheless became suddenly the prey of doubt and fear.

"And this lovely season of the year," she went on, "is only the beginning of the English summer; and Venice has no gardens, nor any flowers—"

"Francesca!" expostulated Roubillac.

"Not like unto these," she said, rising and going to the window and opening the lattice. "Look, Bernardo; look, father!"

It was a scene of delightful contrast to Italy; a scene in which the freshness of English landscape in the springtime has a charm of its own; a lightness in the air, a sprightliness in everything—in the chatter of the brook, the mirth of the blackbird's song, the cheeriness of the lark—a great hopefulness in all things.

Italy may have something of this in its May days, but there is with it a certain languor, a sense of heat, an unvarying blue sky, a drowsiness of the air, the hum of insects rather than the song of birds, for it is in the evening the nightingale sings.

It is possible that Francesca felt the impulse of joy that belongs more to the English spring perhaps than to the April or May of other lands, however much more gorgeous may be their suns and skies, the deep blues of their waters, the luxury of their vines and the burning radiance of their flowers.

"Is it not beautiful!" the woman said, pointing to a corner of the walled-in garden below them.

The picture might well challenge their admiration; not so familiar then as you will find it nowadays, for they have become great gardeners all over the Peak during the present century; indeed, you shall travel the world over and see no finer examples of the art than are to be found in Derbyshire. But it is with the past that we have to do, closely as it may be linked with the present.

In that particular corner of the Old Hall garden to which Francesca pointed, clusters of lilacs,

laburnums, and gelder-roses, which some call Whitsun bosses and others snowballs, were radiant in alternating gold and purple and white against a background of dusky pines.

Fringed with snowy pyramids of white lupins and shadowy clusters of Canterbury bells, the immediate foreground was ablaze with peonies. The foreign trio could not see the wealth of wild hyacinth that filled the air with perfume, wafted by a gentle breeze that came through the adjacent woods, but they found the atmosphere sweet, with varied scents of lilac, budding May and full-blown bluebells.

This fragrant glimpse of cultured ground was but an incident in a broad expanded prospect that might rival the valley of the Adige itself; for the Adige, with its feathery poplars and its fertile plain, was in the mind of Francesca, surprised though she was with the beauty of the British garden, backed with undulating moorland, scrub, and forest, variegated with flashing streams.

The Derwent could be seen, marking its course with green banks and foliage; here and there an oak or an elm standing sentinel over bunches of hawthorns freshly budded, and flanked by flowering chestnuts, the moors and meadows beyond rising gradually toward the sky, Masson, Axe-edge, Mam Tor, Kinderscout and Stanage lost among mountains of white clouds that in their stillness beneath a vast stretch of blue sky might have been the snowy Alps of Italy. Thus ran their thoughts, the three spectators, as they

gazed upon the sunny cumulus, Roubillac voicing their reflections in the remark, "One can almost feel the life in yonder clouds—the mountaineers, the bleating of the goats, the echoes of the torrents, the music of the shepherd's pipe."

"Who can number the clouds in wisdom?" said the priest, quoting his favorite prophet. "Or who can stay the bottles of heaven, when the dust groweth into hardness, and the clouds cleave fast together?"

"Our own Alps are not more beautiful," said Roubillac, the shadow of doubt passing as he looked into the face of his wife, that in its purity of expression was complementary to the scene itself.

Then all in a moment the calm reflective aspect of Francesca's face changed to one of alarm.

"Bernardo!" she exclaimed, clinging to his arm; "Bernardo!"

"Yes, love, yes; what is it?" responded Bernardo, anxiously.

There was to the ear of the priest a certain profanity in the answer that made him cross himself.

"Be not afraid, it is I," said Ziletto, "I am sorry to have disturbed you."

He lifted his broad hat with its plume (his dress was after the fashion of the Court of Charles) as he spoke, and, passing the window, stood in the open doorway, where Francesca had appeared, only a short time before, a vision of grace and beauty.

It was as if the devil in silk and velvet and love-locks had taken her place, though the latter figure could not have failed to please an esthetic taste; not that which in modern days the public has been taught to esteem as esthetic, for this was a full-blooded, masculine, aggressive figure. There was nothing limp or long-necked, nothing anæmic about Ziletto; he was a veritable man of bone and muscle, and, unhappily, with no conscience to mortify the flesh or cloud the eye in which youth and audacity reigned triumphant.

"I was informed that the reverend father was alone," he continued, bowing with great formality to Francesca and Roubillac; "otherwise I would have sought another opportunity to do myself the honor of—"

"You need not embarrass yourself or us with further apology, Signor Ziletto," said Roubillac, taking his wife by the hand; "we bid you good day, signor."

"The same to you, signor and signora," said Ziletto, with a gracious sweep of his hat, as he stood aside and gave way for Roubillac and his wife to pass out.



## CHAPTER SIXTEEN

### GUESTS AT THE MANOR HOUSE

THE midday meal at the Manor House, to which the Mompessons, Clegg and Ziletto had

been invited, had not, in the estimation of Sir George and Clegg, been altogether a satisfactory meeting.

From the point of view of hospitality, it had been everything that host and guests could have desired. It included trout from the Derwent, a chine of beef, a sucking pig, a gammon of bacon, with gooseberry and rhubarb pies, and a remarkable flat cake or pastry of preserve and cream and dainty crust, not unlike what is called the Bakewell pudding of the present day.

The chief topic of conversation was the stranger's arrival at Eyam. Sir George and his friends were all anxious about him and what he had recently seen in the outer world. The Mompessons and Mary Talbot were frank and ingenuous in their treatment of Ziletto. Clegg was unusually reticent, and there was in Sir George's attitude a suggestion of suspicion.

"You were in London in January, Signor Ziletto, so I gathered," said Mr. Mompesson.

"Yes, sir," said Ziletto; "and glad to find quarters at Hampton; such is the name of the palace of the king, on the river Thames."

Sir George looked at Clegg, as much as to say, "Now we shall hear something; keep your ears open; if he is all he professes to be, well; if not, we are not altogether the ignorant barbarians he may think us."

"I had not the honor of being a guest; no, but I had the felicity to be presented to his Majesty. He was very sad about the plague; Parliament, you know, moved to Oxford on that account. It

was a melancholy sight, the metropolis. The bells were tolling, all trade was suspended, there were fearful looks on every face, though the worst was past, they said; and I had the honor to acquaint the king with what I had seen at the exchange. On the other hand, the court was buoyant with your English victories over the Dutch."

Ziletto paused, as if for comment or question. He noted that Miss Talbot's eyes were directed toward him with inquiring interest.

"The cold weather, it was said, had much mitigated the plague, and some of the people who had fled were already returning to their homes. A noble palace, that of Hampton, built by the great Cardinal Wolsey. His Majesty himself showed me the banqueting hall and some fine tapestries, and was gracious enough to invite my opinion upon a question of decorative art. The king has a rare taste; he is himself a study worthy of the finest painter. But I weary you."

"Not at all, signor," said Sir George. "Nothing so interesting as the report of the messenger who is fresh from the field."

"I had the extreme felicity to carry with me to the English court letters from the Venetian republic and from Florence; but what will be of most account to you, Sir George Talbot, is the king's mention of the hospitable lords of Haddon, and the architectural beauties of the Peak country, which he advised me to see, being interested in architecture and the kindred arts.

That is how I came to find my way to this beautiful English village and to this honorable company. The repose that I find here, face to face with Nature, after so many years of sojourning in great cities, in busy camps, and at gay and imperial courts, is refreshment to the soul, and for the weary body a welcome peace."

"He is gifted with a natural eloquence," said Mrs. Mompesson, in an aside remark to her husband.

After dinner Sir George placed his finest Malmsey before his guests, and later they smoked Virginian tobacco from long clay pipes; and Sir George unbuckled his belt, and they all sat at their ease.

It was a large handsome room, and in a corner, by the furthest window that looked upon the garden, there was a spinet, upon which first Mrs. Mompesson played, and then Mary essayed an old English melody simply arranged. Ziletto watched for a favorable opportunity to sit down and try the instrument, and it was strange how different it sounded under his touch.

Mr. and Mrs. Mompesson pulled their chairs near the player, to listen, and Mary would have done so, but Sir George beckoned her to a low stool by his side, where she was often wont to sit with her head upon his knee. Clegg looked on with a passive expression, smoked his pipe and said nothing.

Presently Mary drew her arm round Mrs. Mompesson and led her into the garden. The perfume of the gillyflowers, sweetbrier, lilac and

wild hyacinth was not overcome even by the fumes of the golden weed of the New World. And it was a lovely garden, with trim box-borders, and a high stone wall, against which lay the white blossoms of the early fruit trees that had been sheltered all the winter under heavy mats of rushes. Outside the walls were belts of forest trees, and between their fresh green and young leaves could be seen the distant hills and blue sky, that was banked with radiant clouds.

Mrs. Mompesson was of a much more delicate frame and figure than Mary Talbot. She had large, gray, wistful eyes, and a thoughtful manner, in marked contrast with the healthful merry face of her companion; though she was by no means of a melancholy disposition. She looked almost Quaker-like in her plain black gown with its broad white collar. The latter was pinned with a brooch shaped like a heart, that had been her husband's wedding present. How true and devoted a wife she was it needed not this history to show, for already her name is inscribed on the undying page of the annals of the mountain village.

They stood for a little while upon the terrace, overlooking a wide space of kitchen garden that descended toward a dip in the landscape above which My Lady's Bower nestled among the clumps of foliage.

This outlying post of the Talbot estate has an important bearing on events to come, and, by the way, is not an unusual building; to this day you may see the summer-house or arbor in which

Mary Queen of Scots spent many lonely hours in Chatsworth Park; it was not intended for a prison, any more than My Lady's Bower in the little meadow beyond the Manor House gardens was intended for aught but pleasure and sweet repose.

Mary produced a key, and, running ahead of her guest, opened the quaint old sanctum that at one time had been the gardener's cottage, but which her mother had enlarged into an arbor, where she spent much time over her tapestry frame.

Sir George rarely entered the place, but Mary had lavished such artistic taste as she possessed upon it. She had no personal recollections of her mother, though the arbor had a kind of pleasant mystery for her, associated with the portrait of the beautiful lady whose needle-pictures helped to adorn it.

Mary showed Mrs. Mompesson some of the treasures of the pretty retreat, which had for its outlook one broad window with a seat beneath it, whence you could see the white rocks of Middleton Dale, and beyond, glimpses of the Derwent.

When they were returning to the house along the great path of the kitchen garden, that was bordered with herbs and flowers that are now considered old-fashioned, Mr. Mompesson joined them to take his wife home, and Ziletto and Clegg came to take their leave.

Ziletto kissed the hands of the ladies with much formality, and Mary felt a little shiver run

through her veins when his lips touched her fingers. She turned so pale that Mrs. Mompesson noticed it, and came toward her; but the next moment Mary was rosy red, and the incident passed. Mary gave her hand at parting to Reuben Clegg, who would not for all Eyam have dared to emulate the stranger and touch it with his lips—but different nations, different manners. He pressed Mary's fingers, nevertheless, with more than usual warmth, and so bade her good-day; and thanked Sir George for his hospitality.

There was, however, a certain anxiety in the tone of Clegg's voice that compelled Sir George's attention, and he walked with him into the courtyard, where he also took leave of Ziletto and his neighbors the Mompessons.

Clegg thrust his hands into the pockets of his ample vest and strode out for home, full of anger with himself and all the world, cowed in his own estimation, never so mortifyingly sensible of his ignorance. Every yard he walked he thought of things he might have said, and ought to have said. Facts and opinions of great authorities upon subjects glibly dismissed by Ziletto had occurred to him but hazily. He seemed only to have remembered to forget everything he ever knew, and only to remember that Mary Talbot found her chief delight in listening to the cheap knowledge and tawdry adventures of the Italian.

At the same time he now felt that Mary Talbot was beyond his mark. And yet he was con-

scious that she had encouraged him to believe that he might hope. He recalled more than one occasion when she had looked at him in a way that the least vain of men might have construed into something more than a mere neighborly friendship; and yet, whenever he had made the smallest step toward seeming to accept the challenge, she had gathered her skirts about her and retreated.

"I'm a fool!" he said to himself, as he passed into the shadow of the wood leading to his house. "A fool! What has an ungainly, uneducated, untraveled, low-bred churl, such as I, to do with so much elegance and beauty?"

At about the time when Clegg was thus confessing to himself the hopelessness of his love for Mary Talbot, she had taken her favorite seat by her father, and, after a few commonplaces, had led him on to the subject she was most anxious to have him talk about—what did he think of Signor Ziletto?

"I don't like the fellow," was Sir George's verdict; "by my lady, I don't!" And he pursed up his lips as he said so, and stretched his legs defiantly.

"Oh, father! And wherefore?" asked Mary.

"Damme! He has the eye of an intriguing reprobate! Why, even Mistress Mompesson recoiled before his bold glances."

"Nay! I did not observe it."

"It was the Malmsey that got into his head; reminded him, he said, of his native land. That

was the time he told us of the merchant ships of Venice and their cargoes of the juice of the wine-presses of Greece and Italy. Nothing like a glass of liquor to bring out all that is good and all that is bad in a man."

Sir George himself had his tongue unduly loosened. The effect of a neighborly bout after dinner between Canary and Malmsey was to stimulate Sir George's natural frankness; Mary thought at times it made him censorious.

"Didst notice, as the bottle passed, how modest and friendly our neighbor Clegg became?"

"Modest!" said Mary.

"Ay, modest; had naught to say when he could have said so much."

"He seemed full of thought."

"As if he was cogitating, and yet, at the same time striving to do honor to his host and thee. I said friendly, my sweet wench, inasmuch as he might have wrangled somewhat; even laying aside the opportunity to discuss what he calls the only ethics, and so on; mighty friendly, I call that, and shows more breeding than comes by nature."

"You forget that I was not present during all your conversation, dear father. After the music, I and Mistress Mompesson betook ourselves, by your leave, to walk in the garden," said Mary, unwilling to be drawn into anything like comment of Reuben's conduct.

"The music!" said Sir George, with increased animation. "I never heard the like to be called music."

"Why, I have heard you admire Mistress Mompesson's skill on the spinet."

"And thine own, too, my love—thine own skill and taste above all others. But what did you make of that outlandish stuff; neither melody nor harmony, but only a sort of tuning up and beginning o' things, neither marches nor hymns nor song-tunes nor madrigals, but a jumble of pretenses? Call that music? The Lord preserve me from such strumming!"

"It was, of a truth, strange music," said Mary.

"And you'd had enough, I'll warrant me; and so you and Mistress Mompesson went to walk, and very shrewd it was. Why, 'All in a Garden Green,' and 'Stand to it, Pikemen,' that Mistress Mompesson played to us, was heavenly music compared with such fiddle-faddle; and I wish I had urged her more than I did to sing, for she hath a voice like the dropping of the waters at the Holy Well, and I will not be gain-said when next she doth favor us with her company. 'Tis a right, gentle, well-bred lady, worthy of a better match than a mere clerk in orders."

"Oh, but she is very happy, father; and he is something more than a mere clerk in orders. 'Tis no small distinction to be rector of Eyam, and a man of infinite learning."

"Very well, my love, very well," said Sir George. "Thou knowest I have only the best opinion of the rector and his amiable lady. It is the stranger who has put me out, belike; for

never did good wine less agree with me, or fine tobacco so little soothe my spirits."

"Nay, I am sorry," said Mary, "but Mistress Mompesson considered that our guest was a scholar, and had the gift of tongues; she noted naught in his conversation but what was of true respect. It is the way with men of his nation, they say, to be enthusiastic, warm in their admiration; they call Italy the land of poetry and song."

"Then, damme, I am glad to belong to a land of commonsense; and land of men—not monkeys. Why, foregad, he chattered like a magpie."

The truth is there was a certain impulse of jealousy in Sir George's feelings against Ziletto. The Italian had proved himself the best man at the table. He not only drank his wine with the air of one accustomed to the best, but with a capacity that even Sir George envied. At the same time his guest had talked better than any one, and to the undisguised delight of his daughter and Mrs. Mompesson. He had outshone both Clegg and the clergyman. He was posted in every subject they mentioned. Neither Sir George nor Mr. Clegg could mount one of their hobbies, not a single one. Sir George felt that if he had dared to bestride his easiest one, the stranger would have unhorsed him. "He is the very devil," Sir George had grumbled to himself as he passed the bottle. And Mompesson had encouraged "the beggar." That annoyed Sir George, and also troubled Clegg. Mom-

person had said that travelers were the only scholars, travel the only knowledge; and Ziletto had done his best to justify the clergyman's opinion. Moreover, Ziletto had no sooner sat down than he felt by instinct that he had a rival in Mr. Reuben Clegg, the village solon, the clown, the man whom he would make it his business, if opportunity should occur, to place in a ridiculous position. Nobody knew better than Ziletto how poor a creature a man looked in a woman's eyes if he should appear ridiculous. Clegg was wary, as well as depressed; his was the waiting game. But there are men who wait too long on fortune and let her favors slip; lovers too modest for the winning of women's favors; it is the bold wooer who succeeds. Once or twice during the dinner-talk Ziletto had caught Mary's eye in close observation of him and with an undisguised admiration that had prompted a significant response. There may be a world of meaning in a look. For Mary there was a strange mysterious charm in the glance of the Italian at the moment when she had been most absorbed in his conversation. It was a story of adventure with banditti in Spain which had most interested Mary, and at the point when the hero was most in peril she uttered an unconscious sigh of alarm, which was a confession of both admiration and pity. Then it was that Ziletto had glanced at her, and she had blushed; and it was that look and that blush that had fired Sir George. Both had also been observed by Reuben Clegg, and while the passing incident

had set Sir George talking and for the first time contesting Ziletto's conclusions, and had fired him into relating an experience of his own, their effect upon Clegg was to silence him almost to the verge of moroseness.

It was at that moment that the full ripe seed of hatred of the Italian fell plump into Clegg's receptive heart. He did not know at what exact moment it had found its way there; but it was sown in the glance Ziletto gave to Mary Talbot in response to her strangely sympathetic exclamation, a glance that seemed to have a message in it, and a message that she accepted.

And so the seed of a deadly hate fell into the soul of Reuben Clegg; and not as a consequence thereof, but by way of fulfillment of the proverb that misfortunes never come singly, there began to gather clouds that eventually overshadowed the mountain paradise of Eyam.

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## CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

“WOMAN'S AT BEST A CONTRADICTION STILL”

AT an unusually early hour next day Mary Talbot, looking a little less rosy than usual, called upon Mrs. Mompesson.

The rectory was a pleasant house. It was of the Tudor order, built of stone and neatly thatched. Mary passed in at the open door, along a whitened passage, a great oak dower

chest standing between the entrances to the dining-room and parlor on one side of the hall. Facing these apartments was the rector's study; and at the back, through the way to the kitchen, you caught a glimpse of the garden and generally heard the sound of children's voices.

Mrs. Mompesson was very proud of her two little ones; so proud that old Dame Fearset, who hourly looked forward to her heavenly reward with the saints, hoped the rector's lady might not be called to a judgment for loving them unduly. The children romped into the house to greet Mary, who brought some harmless sweetmeats in her reticule for them, and they kissed her heartily. They loved Mary, as did everybody in the village, not to mention every dog and cat.

Mrs. Mompesson, with a large white apron enfolding her neat figure, was busy with her household duties, and Mary, laying aside her hat, if she did not take a share in her friend's domestic labors, walked about the house and chatted while the work was progressing. After a little while the conversation became concentrated upon the chief guest of the previous day at the Manor House. Mary was anxious to know what the final impression of the Mompessons might be concerning Ziletto. She hoped it might neutralize that of her father, and at the same time support her own.

"I think he is a fine gentleman," said Mrs. Mompesson, "handsome, and of an infinite variety of knowledge."

"I am glad you do not think him a mountebank, or a monkey, or worse," said Mary, with a smile; "but you know how Sir George is apt to overstep his meaning when he desires to be emphatic."

"Poor dear Sir George!" said Mrs. Mompesson "He does not like foreigners, and perhaps he thought my husband was too well pleased with Signor Ziletto."

"Mr. Mompesson approved of him?" said Mary, with an assumption of carelessness.

"I think he is quite attached to him; but William has found Eyam rather bigoted—I am sorry to say so—and proportionately ignorant; and the Stanley faction and the relaxation of church discipline have lowered his mental activity. This stranger has seemed to him like a messenger from afar, with news of the great world; and one great thing he finds to commend in the Italian is that he is tolerant; though evidently at heart a Papist, he does not regard the future of any other Church as hopeless. He evaded theological controversy as much as possible, and he was certainly enchanting as a mere conversationalist. There appears to be no finality to his accomplishments."

And then Mary changed the subject, fearing that she might say more than was discreet. . . . For now she knew that she had two great secrets to guard; the knowledge of Reuben Clegg's love for her, and her own love for this stranger, of whom she knew nothing, and who had succeeded in exciting the hostility of her father. It was

all so sudden, too; first, the shock of Mrs. Clegg's appeal, second, the confession of her own heart—a secret that as yet she hardly understood. If it was love, as indeed she believed it to be, it was a curious self-consciousness, a shrinking from the object of her unexplainable adoration, and at the same time a desire to see the stranger continually and to talk of him. She had never hitherto been fastidious about her dress; but her toilet had now become a matter of supreme importance.

Margaret Dobbs, who had been her nurse and maid, her companion and housekeeper, and in many ways a mother to her, noted the change that had come over her, and in a day or two half-suspected the cause; but Mary, as soon as she had herself discovered her own secret, set about protecting it and watching over it. Had her father taken to the stranger, she might in time have confessed the deep interest she felt in him; but Sir George had an instinctive feeling that Ziletto had made a powerful impression upon his daughter, and he took every opportunity to disparage him and to wonder when the village would be free of him; and so Mary affected to no longer find any special interest in him, either as scholar or musician.

But Ziletto knew where she walked and when, and Mary took pains to go out only when her father went riding or had business with Clegg, or would, as he did occasionally, find that duty or friendship called him away to Calver or Bake-well, or to Chatsworth; and Ziletto was contin

ually on the watch for the girl, who would sometimes go forth ostentatiously on a pretended visit to the rectory or to see Mrs. Clegg, so as to content her woman Dobbs. At other times she would steal out without a word, and she invariably met the stranger.

If the stranger could so arrange it, he brought about the meeting where they could be least observed. At first he only walked a little way with her, and, being encountered by any of the villagers, would doff his hat and continue his course in an opposite direction from that of Mary, taking his leave in a ceremonious fashion, and, if possible, entering into conversation with the villagers who had interrupted their *tete-a-tete*.

After a time he and Mary met in some by-way outside the village. There were many convenient lanes and meadow footpaths, and in Middleton Dale there were romantic retreats, and nooks and corners, that could be reached from opposite directions. Mary, in the most accidental way, found her steps wandering in these paths, and encouraged herself to be surprised; agreeably surprised, nevertheless, when she met Giovanni Ziletto. She was, furthermore, encouraged to indulge in these stolen interviews by the most respectful propriety with which the Italian treated her. He said nothing of love, if he looked it the more. He talked of Italy and his house in Florence, of the beauties of the City of the Sea, the pageantry on the Grand Canal, and the delights of travel.

Once, when Sir George was out, Ziletto had boldly walked up to the Manor House gates with Mary, and meeting there Mrs. Margaret Dobbs, that dear old slave of the family had taken upon herself to invite the stranger in to see the garden, since she had heard him say he was fond of flowers, and, in an impulsive moment, Mary had introduced him to the secret of My Lady's Bower. Ever afterward it had been a leading motive of his intrigue to make that retreat the scene of at least an occasional rendezvous with the girl. There was a private and rarely used gateway from the meadow and orchard beyond the kitchen garden that could be used for this purpose; it gave upon a footpath into a by-way of Middleton Dale.

One day, Reuben Clegg, walking home from the Winship Mine to think out some new problem of his work, had come upon Mary and Giovanni Ziletto, at a bend of the highway where it gave upon a secluded lane. Ziletto had caught a glimpse of the villager, and before Mary understood his meaning had said, "And now, Miss Talbot, I have the honor to take my leave."

But the next moment she saw Mr. Clegg, and understood. Ziletto turned the way Reuben was coming, gave him a formal bow, and passed on, Reuben stiffly acknowledging the salute.

"I wish you a good-day, Miss Talbot," said Reuben, a little awkwardly, to Mary; "hope you find yourself in good health."

"Yes, thank you, Mr. Clegg," she replied.

"I ought to apologize for my appearance."

“And wherefore?” Mary replied, with a little flush of confusion. She had mistaken Clegg’s meaning.

“My mining doublet, my muddy boots,” said Clegg. “I am not used to walk home; generally ride; but I find I can think best afoot.”

“Indeed!” said Mary.

“I detain you,” said Clegg. “You were going toward Cucklett; it is a pretty walk.”

“No, I was returning home,” she said; her conscience smiting her for an unnecessary lie. She had never lied nor blushed nor temporized with truth, in thought or word, before Ziletto came to Eyam.

“I dare not offer to walk by you; I should shame you,” said Reuben, rubbing some of the mud from his boots among the weeds and nettles that bordered the edge of the roadway.

“You shame yourself with so poor an excuse,” said Mary; and the two walked along the road together.

Reuben, chafing at sight of the Italian in Mary’s company, and believing that Ziletto had intended to walk with her along the lane to Cucklett, was more constrained in his conversation than usual, though he would have thawed with encouragement. But Mary was afraid of him now. She did not know at what moment he might break out into a declaration of his love for her. So she drew herself together, tightened her lips, and walked with an almost feverish rapidity. Reuben made commonplace remarks, and she replied.

Between the stray sentences Clegg devoured her with his eyes, and wondered why he had not the courage to speak to her of what he felt. Then, the next moment, he knew why he had not the courage; he was not brave enough to face her confession that she had no love to offer in return for his own.

Just as the road dropped toward the village, Reuben saw Ziletto waiting at a secluded path which was the nearest way to the Manor House. Remarking that she was now in sight of home, he bade Miss Talbot good afternoon, thanked her for the honor of her company, and struck out in the direction of his own cottage and with a sudden determination in his mind. He would see Sir George and enter straightway into competition with this wretched foreigner for the hand of his daughter. It might not have occurred to Sir George or to any other person that Ziletto was in pursuit of his daughter, honorably or dishonorably; the idea that it was possible for the stranger to win even a smile from her except in the way of honorable love did not dwell with Clegg for a moment; yet it flashed through his mind that with this kind of runagate, this beplumed, dandified mandolinist, this braggart of his prowess, this fable maker, this mountebank modeler, sculptor, courtier, student, or whatever the devil he might call himself—that in the constitution of such a creature reverence for woman, respect for innocence and beauty would have no place. At the same time Clegg recalled that there had been such a sacrifice as a pure and high-minded

English girl giving herself away to a foreigner of distinction so-called; and he reflected that this man brought with him a certain glamour of royal association—true or false, who was to say?—moreover he had the kind of tongue and the puny grace of crooking an elbow according to rule when he lifted his hat, and had a manner of bowing ceremoniously, that might take the fancy of a feather-brain stay-at-home girl; but surely not a young woman of commonsense like Mary Talbot, proud of her birth, devoted to her father, the ideal of all that was good and sweet and bright in woman! He would ask her father's permission to pay court to her, to win her before he laid bare his heart to her; he would enter the lists against this decked-out foreigner, and drift no further into settled misery and disappointment without giving Fate the chance to be good to him or to desert him quite.

Meanwhile, Ziletto had himself half resolved to beard Sir George, for he had seen enough of the English girl to know that all his arts could make no light-o'-love of Mary Talbot. What she called her love was only to be secured by marriage, and already he had a scheme to overcome her scruples in case he asked her hand from Sir George to be refused, or in case he did not deem it wise to take the risk of such a step.

It was not Ziletto's game to marry, nor ever had been; though his infatuation for Mary Talbot, whose beauty was so unusual in his eyes, whose voice and figure and unsophisticated ways were so fascinating, was such that he would have

been willing to undergo any sacrifice to win her. It would have been all the same to Ziletto, marriage or otherwise, when the day of satiety came, or his fancy should be attracted elsewhere.

He had left Roubillac and Francesca in peace. Francesca, relieved of his presence—his magnetism, or whatever it was—her mind and body stimulated by the fine mountain air of these Northern uplands, had, she thanked Heaven, grown out of the check of what she conceived to be his magic, his evil eye, his unholy charm.

With a boldness that had at first amazed Roubillac, and had then captured his confidence, Ziletto had forced himself upon the painter's attention. He had expressed his regret for what had transpired in the past, and had vowed never again to use his arts, whatever they might be, to disturb either Francesca or himself; assured him that his presence there was accidental, and appealed to Roubillac as an Italian to maintain at least an appearance of friendship before the English people; if they had misunderstandings or affronts to avenge, to let them wait a fitting opportunity when they should all return to their own country.

"As for your wife, comrade," he said, "it was your Angel of the Ascension at Verona that tempted me; and, after all, I did but frighten her, as some ogre might. Nay, believe me; and in the future it shall be my chiefest aim to have her hate me."

Roubillac had listened patiently, repressing the

anger with which he contemplated the airiness of the gallant who did not fail to suggest, with all his proffered friendship, that if it were his will to do so he could still captivate the woman who was not only Roubillac's wife, but, of all things in the world, the one he most loved, to lose whom would be to fill his soul with everlasting darkness. Roubillac, in his heart, hated Ziletto for this, although he affected to feel, and to some extent did feel, that it was kind of this man, to whom Nature had been so bountiful of physical and mental gifts, to swear at least a truce as regarded his pursuit of Francesca. It was a strange situation, and, viewed by a dispassionate looker-on, one of keen humiliation so far as Roubillac was concerned, and a doubting of his wife that might make her appear unworthy of his love. But one must take into account the supernatural kind of power, with which she had, by her confession, invested Ziletto.

A poet in sentiment and fancy, a dreamer, and one who had been trained from his youth in all the superstitions of his church, Roubillac easily fell a victim to this belief in Ziletto's mysterious gifts, and he was supported in his credulity by Father Castelli, who believed that in what he called these latter days, before the second coming of Christ, the devil was unusually active and had many agencies. The priest found justification for his opinion in our Saviour's own words touching false prophets and evil spirits. It was no new thing to see the arch-fiend in a lovely and charming shape; and Father Castelli knew

that he had no hold upon Ziletto, that the Italian reprobate laughed at his mission, even derided the Pope, and was so variously and strangely gifted in knowledge and accomplishments, and so defiant in his sins, that the priest could only account for his prosperity therein on the ground of Satanic influence. When it was borne in upon him one day, in a conversation he had with Ziletto, that Miss Talbot, the young and beautiful daughter of the village, was under his spell, he took counsel with himself as to his duty of warning the girl and her father; but it had been the strict policy of himself and his superior not to interfere with the villagers or their ways, and seeing that Sir George himself had made Ziletto his guest, and that Ziletto was outside the pale of the working community of the Italians at the Old Hall, he had let the matter pass. It was, however, with deep regret that he heard the committee of the Well-dressings, or celebration of Ascension, had accepted Ziletto's services as the designer of one of their chief decorations; the more so, as Roubillac had been granted a similar privilege, which would set up a fresh rivalry between the two, and at the same time bring Ziletto into what might be called official relationship with Miss Talbot, who was one of the principal persons engaged in the organization of the celebration. Eyam had previously been in the habit of seeking outside assistance on these occasions, the artistic work of the festival being regarded as a thing apart from whatever religious significance the occasion might have in the

estimation of the more serious of the villagers and the few scholars of the High Peak Hundred.

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## CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

### MARY TALBOT'S MESSAGE TO REUBEN CLEGG

"I WILL ply her with such questions that she shall open her heart to me without seeming to do so," said Sir George, addressing Reuben Clegg, who, with his beard trimmed, his doublet unusually neat, and his high boots pulled up over his well-formed legs, had presented himself before Sir George almost in holiday fashion. "She has much altered of late, and is less communicative; but thou knowest the Well-dressing is occupying her. There never have been such fine things as we are to see this year, Reuben."

"I have surprised you in what I have said," remarked Reuben, his hat in his hand, his attitude, cross-legged upon one of Sir George's library chairs, not altogether elegant.

"I will not say that I was quite prepared for it," Sir George replied, seated at his large square table, as if he had been holding what he called his Court as a Justice of the Peace. Reuben, however, looked anything but a culprit, for now that he had made his declaration he was his own defiant self again.

"I know it is an act of presumption, Sir George; and yet I draw my pedigree from an

honorable ancestry of yeomen and squires of note among these hills and valleys."

"My dear Clegg, I would hold it honorable to have you for a son-in-law; and on that there is no more to be said."

"Thank you, Sir George, I am content; I want to hear no more, except that I have your consent to offer my hand to your daughter; and with it, so help me Heaven, I would be willing to give her my life, just as I would deem it blessed to be her slave."

"Nay; damme, Clegg, that is not what I would have—thee or any man. Have a wife and rule a wife is my motto; he is a poor husband who is not master of his house, and I would not have Mary mated to a milk-sop."

"I trust," said Reuben, rising, "I should know how to win your daughter's respect; at the same time, Sir George, I should be at heart her slave, as I know you are, Sir George. Nay, when a man loves a woman, be it his daughter, his mother, or his wife, she is first in his thoughts; her wishes are his commands. I love your daughter Mary, Sir George, and I have only one object in life, whether she bids me hope or whether she leaves me to despair, and that is her happiness."

"It is well said, Reuben Clegg; and thou art right after all—a man is a mere appendage to some woman's petticoat all his life, and I suspect my daughter would have a rival in thy mother." The genial knight laughed pleasantly as he took Clegg's hand, saying further, "I shall speak to my daughter at once, Clegg—at once—

and let thee know whether thou wilt be wise to go on with this thing."

"My mother would be her mother, heart and soul, and also in her service, her woman, an it so pleased her, her help, her housekeeper, as she is mine; and in all things her devoted friend, loving her with a mother's devotion. And, Sir George, I would say furthermore, since worldly affairs have to be considered when one asks so great a boon as the right of companionship with so loved an object, that I am rich, as Eyam and the Hundred goes; that besides the sum I derive from our association—"

"Our partnership, Clegg," said Sir George, "for thou art part owner of the Winship Mine."

"Thank you, Sir George," Clegg replied. "But, as I was saying, besides that, I have other means, and, moreover, within the last few months have made fresh discoveries of ore that cannot fail to yield both honor and gold."

"Thine own heart is gold enough for me, Clegg, if my daughter consents."

"Nay, you are most generous," said Clegg, "and I feel the honor of it. Come what come may, Sir George, I am glad I have made you my confidant. At one time I thought I should carry my wild ambition to my grave unconfessed. I think I came to you now despairing; but I shall forever treasure your friendly words."

"Reuben," said the knight, "you and I will always be good friends. Come to me in an hour, and I will advise you on the course you should take with regard to my daughter."

In an hour Reuben returned. He found Sir George in the library, sitting in the same chair, and ready to receive him once more, as if the question at issue was one of magisterial jurisdiction.

When one speaks of a library of those days, it is to recall a room adapted rather to the storing of a few well-bound books than to their presence in large numbers. There was a single bookcase against the wall by Sir George's chair. The shelves were not filled. The entire collection consisted of some twenty or thirty volumes. Upon his large oak table, which was covered with a purple cloth embroidered down the sides and fastened at the corners with bands of braid, there was a large inkstand of carved wood, a pounce-box, and an open volume of legal practice by the side of a calf-bound Bible. The walls were paneled to the ceiling, which carried an oaken design of geometric character. There were a few carved oak chairs, with leather seats, and one or two wolf-skins upon a rough oak floor. The bay windows, with small square panes and lattices, looked out upon the courtyard.

"Be seated, Reuben, my friend," said Sir George, in an almost judicial manner.

Reuben preferred to stand. There was something in Sir George's voice and manner that told him he was in for an adverse verdict, and he preferred to hear it on his feet.

"I have not told my daughter what you have said, but I have rather expressed my own wishes."

"Yes, Sir George."

"My own wishes," went on the knight, nibbling a pen as he spoke and looking down upon a blank sheet of paper. "I have said that nothing could give me greater satisfaction than to know that if I were called away she would have a friend and protector in a true man with the rights of a husband."

"Yes, Sir George."

"I told her I had reason to believe I knew such a man: that of a surety I knew him to be honorable, of a reputable ancestry, a man of means sufficient without her own patrimony to maintain her in good state; and, above all, a man who loved her and was devoted to her best interests."

"Yes, Sir George; it was most kind to say so. I am mightily beholden to you, Sir George," said Reuben, his face flushed with excitement.

"She asked me if she knew him, and I replied, of course she did: and then I beat about the bush no further, but told her out straight that you were the man, and that you had my full permission to speak to her and my best wishes for your success."

"Thank you, Sir George. And she said?"

"Ah, now comes the trouble, Reuben. She would say neither one thing nor the other—not a Yes nor a No: but only, 'Does Mr. Clegg wish to be my friend?' 'Why, of course he does,' I said, 'and the best of all friends; the man to stand by your side through life and prove it against all comers.'"

"Yes, Sir George?" said Reuben, with a great

note of interrogation in his voice, his heart beating fearfully, for he almost knew what was coming.

“‘Then tell him,’ she said, ‘never to speak of this to me; never to ask me to be his wife, never to discourse of love to me, but to let me be his friend, as I have been ever since I could discern the meaning of friendship—and oh,’ she said, ‘tell him this in such a way that it shall not seem as if I had refused him, which, indeed,’ she said, ‘I do not in words: but let him not think of me in that way, but only as his friend—as our friend.’ And, by gad, Reuben, she talked like a woman; no longer the little girl I had thought her, no longer our belle of the village, our dimpled maiden of the fetes, our madcap, or merry companion, but a woman, mark you—a woman with convictions and knowledge! And there we are, my friend; not exactly at the end of the lane, but far from any sight of its turning.”

“Which means,” said Reuben, straightening himself up, his face no longer flushed, his manner no longer excitable, but with a resigned air, “which means that she rejects me.”

“Nay; but, Reuben—” said Sir George.

“Pardon me, Sir George; in my heart I expected nothing else; but when you have followed a false lead it is well to be satisfied, to dig out the last bit of the shale and know the worst. And it is like Miss Talbot to make it easy for me, sparing me the unhappy word from her own lips, and the mortification of it. Well, so be it; it cannot be said at some future day that I did

not brave my fate, that I did not meet it half-way and challenge it; and it shall not be said that I did not bear it like a man. Good-by, Sir George, and thank you. We will still make the Winship Mine a very noble inheritance."

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## CHAPTER NINETEEN

### RIVALS, AND THE DAGGER

AND so it came to pass that Reuben Clegg, the man who loved her with all his great manly heart, drew more apart from the village, and became more of a skeptic than ever touching revealed religion, and something of a misanthrope. It was not alone disappointed love that gave an added emphasis to his unbelief, but he was a thinker and lived much with Nature, which Mompesson, and even Stanley, agreed should have brought him well within the fold—and with such a pure-minded and religious mother. But Reuben had a logical mind, and an intellectual capacity of introspection. In giving his mind perfect freedom, he found that it threw off the trammels of doctrine and Biblical tradition, and that the range of his appreciation of the Giver of all gifts, the first great cause, the spirit of creation, was thus made infinite. What was, however, far more a motive power of late in this discovery, was the preference which Mary Talbot showed for the society of Giovanni Ziletto, who,

despite all the diplomatic arts of Sir George Talbot, was gradually becoming the chief personage in the village—the man most considered by all, and the man who, Reuben felt, was unworthy of the friendship of the very humblest in the community. This was jealousy, of course; but Reuben respected Mary Talbot too much to mention his doubts and fears in this direction to Sir George, and he took all possible opportunity to avoid the Italian.

One evening, however, meeting Giovanni in the narrow path that led from Middleton Dale into the further end of the village street, the devil in Reuben's nature tempted him to take that side of the path which the Italian had evidently selected.

Giovanni was fresh from a stolen interview with Mary, and there was, if not in his face and manner, a sense of exultation tingling in his blood as he came upon his rival.

Reuben strode on and kept that side of the path which Ziletto had held, and, without even the compromise of a "By your leave" or "I beg your pardon," jostled the Italian aside. It was not a blow, but to all intents and purposes no less insulting.

The Italian turned with an angry exclamation, and, drawing his dagger, rushed upon Reuben, who stepped back a pace, and, bending his body so that the Italian reaching him would lose force, caught his assailant by both wrists, his face close to Ziletto's. The next moment the Italian's grip of the dagger relaxed, and, as Reuben tripped

him neatly with his right foot, it fell upon the ground, and the Italian went sprawling into the hedge on the other side of the pathway.

Reuben picked up the dagger, a long, vicious, shining blade, with a jeweled handle, and the Italian scrambled to his feet.

“Coward!” said the Englishman. “And is this the weapon you use without word of warning? Well, take it,” and he flung it at him, the Italian catching it deftly. “I have a knife, too,” tapping the sheath of a stiff, powerful kind of blade, of a kind that nearly every man carried, but more for utility than offense—a pruning knife, a bread cutter, a forester’s and farmer’s companion, “and I’ll meet thee where thou shalt appoint, and make shift to take a lesson in so mean a fence, and better the instruction, may be; an’ if I fail, why, then the score shall count to thee, thou — intriguing mountebank!”

Ziletto turned pale with rage beneath his olive skin, and without a word of response to Reuben’s challenge again flew at his throat with a deadly rush, but as he flung out his arm with murderous intent, Reuben caught him a clip across the shins (a trick one of his Lancashire miners had taught him) that brought the Italian down upon his knees, as if in a sudden act of supplication.

“I would have rather met thee fair and square, my lad,” said Reuben, “knife to knife, if ’tis the manner of thy nation, or at single-stick, or even a bit of sword-play; but the devil take thy vengeful ways and thy ready knife! Say thy prayers, and get thee back to the inn and play on thy

cursed fiddle, and tell Radford and the constable thou'st had a bout wi' Reuben Clegg!"

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## CHAPTER TWENTY

### "FROM THISTLES GRAPES AND FROM LILIES THORNS"

THE last days of Easter had come. Eyam was preparing for celebrating the Ascension. Added to the calendar by the Council of Orleans, as far back as the year 511, the festival is still a living event in the valley of the Derwent and on the banks of her sister river, the Wye.

Tissington, made famous by the Howitts and the Jewitts, carries the palm in our time, vainly competed for by rival villages in the Hundreds of Scarsdale and the Peak, since Eyam, more than two hundred years ago, drew her widowed weeds about her and retired within herself, a pathetic mourner; but in the days of Mary Talbot and the strangers at the Old Hall, Eyam was queen of the flowering wells.

Then, as now, the village was blessed with an abundant supply of fresh clear water. No housewife had to go far to fill her pails, and the music of the crystal flow was everywhere, mingled in summer with the song of birds and always with the happy voices of children.

The glorification of God's fountains as proper to the celebration of the Ascension seems almost

peculiar to Derbyshire. The method of decoration is chiefly Italian in its character. It is probably a tradition of Old Rome, a relic of the Pagan tribute to Flora, coming down to us through the ages. To the Pagan in due course succeeded the Christian formula. This is common enough in religious festivals, Pagan, Hebraic, Christian (Catholic and Protestant), each adapting what was best in the other's ceremonies; and to-day the towns and villages on the Derwent, the Noe, and the Wye dress their wells and springs with flowers, assemble their clergy and their choirs, and serve God with prayer and with anthem, filling the air with gladness and with joy.

The village well-dressing of Derbyshire is no mere matter of hanging garlands around the springs or carpeting the way thereto. Each well is the subject of a special design, an artistic effort that takes architectural form, becomes a floral temple, or a classic vestibule to the gushing waters.

On one of these festival days, not alone in regard to the beauty of the designs and their superb combinations of color, but on account of the climate itself, you might fancy yourself in the South of Europe; for in this many-sided country of ours you may occasionally come upon such sunshine and scents of flowers, such soft hills of foliage and verdant valleys that might well be Italian.

What is not a little notable in this midland festival of the Ascension is the beauty of the

decorative work of the peasantry. Art is a native impulse. If the savages of the Congo can charm the European eye with both the color and form of many of their native ornaments, there should be no room for surprise that, catching the tradition of Rome in the dressing of the wells, the native English should have found sufficient imagination for artistic expression in the forms around them, and in the varied colors of the garden, the meadows, the forest and the moorlands, when the time comes round to sweep up their villages, whitewash their houses, put up their clean blinds, and make their paths sweet and straight for their annual celebration.

Just as it was in the early days of the Well-dressing, so it is even now. Less than thirty years ago, Mrs. Howitt Watts came upon a scene at Tissington that might have been a reminiscence of the neighboring Eyam of our history some hundred and fifty years before. She found there a young artist at work on one of the decorative emblems, "whose singularly Italian type of face, his dark eyes and brown complexion were such as you might have expected rather to have encountered in Italy than in a village of Central England." He may well have been descended from one of those same Italian artists of the days of this present history, for it rarely happened that foreigners were brought over to England for the practice of special arts and industries, but some of them remained to leaven the native stock of stubborn strength with a strain of gentleness and ingenuity.

And there never was a time when the English, despite their prejudices, did not draw, from all sources, available aids to national, light and leading, occasionally, perhaps, to the unworthy exclusion of native skill. We have always been liberal in our welcome of foreign art, and depreciative of our own. When Tom Killigrew talked to Samuel Pepys about a new playhouse, to be built in Moorfields, London, where opera was to be a feature of the year's entertainment, he "did send for voices, and painters and other persons from Italy." But in a general way, the original Well-decorators of Derbyshire were villagers, who, with the same instinct that one sees in even the most primitive peoples, contrived pieces of ornamental design of singular grace, and with the impulse of worship. There was a hearty rivalry among the village artists in their schemes of decoration, but they all had a similar method. In the first place, a wooden frame of the shrine to be erected was made; it was constructed in parts, so that it was portable and easy of treatment. Each section was covered with clay, mixed with salt to preserve its moisture. Upon the clay the native artist drew the pattern he intended to fill, and this he embroidered with flowers. The buds and blossoms, twigs, leaves and grasses were pressed into the design and manipulated with a tool, the result being a kind of mosaic, as rich as tapestry. Sometimes the designs were realizations of an existing work of art, but they were mostly fantastic efforts at ornamentation, embodying a text

or a symbol, the effect being often both beautiful and impressive.

There had, however, never been such a Well-dressing as in the year of grace that saw the artists of Florence and the "Bride of the Adriatic" at work in friendly rivalry with the villagers of Eyam. Moreover, an added impulse had been given to the success of the festival by the unproclaimed rivalry of Ziletto and Roubillac. As a curious fate would have it, Roubillac had obtained permission to decorate "Clegg's Well," and Ziletto that known as the "Manor House Spring."

Roubillac had drawn a design which, as an example of the Italian or Cinque-Cento style of decorative art, was, no doubt, a masterpiece. To be in order, as far as possible, it needed the three secondary colors in its flowers—orange, green and purple. It was a happy time for carrying this esthetic feeling to a sensitive perfection that, in the leading form of the period, the acanthus scroll or foliated spiral, a complete iris was almost a necessity. Roubillac had interpreted himself in the dignity of his arabesque, and in that perfection of the ideal which the cultured Italian found in the true revival of the ancient art of Greece and Rome, achieved during the sixteenth century of the natural style of Cinque-Cento. The intricate tracery and delicate scroll-work of leaf and flowers, which was characteristic of the Renaissance, admirably fitted the purpose of the Well-dressing, and appealed to the Roubillac imagination; it combined

a certain severity of treatment, a discipline of method, with poetic departures and new beauties of curves and dainty foliations.

As for color, there was the gorgeous iris ready to his hand—or to Francesca's rather, for it was she who collected most of the material he required when the last day came for completing the adornment of the model, which was a shrine that was especially Christian in its symbolism. For orange or gold, there was the gorse of the common, the marshgold or May-blob, the golden tresses of the laburnum; and for the purple, the quaint columbine and the garden petunia.

Roubillac saw in this festival of the Wells that solemn anniversary recognized by St. Chrysostom as one of the principal holy days of the Crucifixion, the Passion, the Resurrection, and "the Pentecostal out-pouring of the Holy Spirit." He and Father Castelli discovered, in the subject, matter for much research and learned debate, and the priest was able to quote both St. Chrysostom and St. Augustine on the festival of the Ascension, which this Well-dressing of Derbyshire had become and still remains, "the illustrious and refulgent day of the Assumption of the Crucified," and, according to St. Augustine, "the day on which we celebrate the Ascension of our Lord to heaven."

Eyam did not, however, confine its celebration to the mere religious aspect of the holiday. After its sober procession, the blessing of the Wells and a service in the church, the day was concluded with feasting and merry-making, and,

the weather permitting, with a dance upon the Green; thus retaining something of an echo, however slight, of the ancient festival of Pagan Rome, happily dominated with the grave and pure celebrations of the Church, the form of the service, from Roman Catholicism to simple Protestantism, making little or no difference in the character of the general ceremonial, which was denuded only of some extra color in the matter of ecclesiastical vestments, though the long cloak, the white bands, the black hose and buckled shoes did not militate against the bright colors of the gay ribbons of the women, the silks and velvets of the men, and, here and there, the Royalist hat and feathers.

It is hardly necessary to say that it was not the Christian side of the festival that appealed to the licentious nature of Giovanni Ziletto. He saw in it only a survival of the Floralia, the shameless Games of Flora, at Rome. His fervid imagination went back to the revels of those classical and mythical days, the real and imaginary life of which, steeped in lust and licentiousness, is deemed most fitting for the study of English youth, to be pored over in a dead language and translated into our native tongue. Be sure Giovanni Ziletto had made the classic pages of Greece and Rome his careful study. Be sure there was no Feast of Bacchus, no Olympian games, no celebration of Flora, at which, in imagination, he had not assisted. Be sure that such art as he had mastered to give expression to this lurid past would find inspira-

tion in its coarsest aspect. His Flora, had he given rein to his fancy, would have been the common courtesan, who endowed the Romans with such spoil of her mates that they instituted the infamous feast; from which, however, both Judaism and Christianity managed to pluck the flower of purity, as if to show that nothing can be all bad in this world, and that the story of the Magdalen might be quoted to justify the unquenchable nobility of the perfect essence of life and the Christian symbolism of being born again.

It is in this wise that the Christian succession to the celebration of Flora may be said to have blotted out the original sin of it, transforming the very name into a term of beauty for Nature's vegetable kingdom.

Ziletto was too subtle an epicurean, too skilled a diplomatist in the art of conciliation, to show Eyam his black imagination in the decoration of the Manor House spring. Nevertheless, it was a clay model of Flora, with a cornucopia in her arms and a crown of flowers upon her head; no mere nude study in the daring pose she occupied in his mind, but a chaste piece worthy of Roubillac himself. She was of heroic size, leaning upon an archway over the natural spring that flowed from a rocky bank and made for itself a deep, glassy pool; and it was with a view to an effect of artistic reflection therein that Ziletto had made his plans.

But, alas, this mere design of clay was only part of Ziletto's intrigue against Mary Talbot and the general peace of the village; and it was

on the eve of the festival that he obtained an ally in the execution of his villainy whose selfish credulity and lapse from honor is only another of the thousand and one inexplicable perversities and mysteries of the human heart.

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## CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

### BY DEVIOUS WAYS

NOT yet summer, but all the world full of its coming. More beautiful than summer for the joy of its approach. Sweeter than summer for the very freshness of things—the greenness of the leaves, the tender tints, and the luscious gums of bursting buds. May is marching on to June. The air is pulsating with new life, and every bird that sings welcomes the morning.

On the village green, the horse-chestnut is putting forth its waxy flowers. In the woods and along the village street and around the square church tower the oak and the elm are in competition, branch for branch. In the Manor House garden, and in the meadows beyond, the mountain ash, the guelder rose, the laburnum, and the last of the lilacs are full of strange whispers. The breath of the hawthorn and the jubilant welcome of the thrush saluted Mary Talbot as she opened her casement and looked out upon the new-born day, ere yet the sun had risen above the mountain tops. It was with

wistful eyes that she gazed upon the familiar scene, which seemed to have new and strange messages for her. As her eyes fell upon her own fair hand that held the casement open she noted upon her finger the first ring she had ever worn—no plain gold band, but a loop of jeweled gold. She bent forward and kissed it, and there came, in response to the pressure of her dewy lips, a thousand rays of splendor. Then she sighed and smiled between her tears. Rival songsters caroled forth in answer to the thrush; and, brushing away her tears of shadowed bliss, she wrapped her morning-gown about her fair young limbs and stole into the adjoining room, where Margaret Dobbs sat up in bed, her old eyes brightening at sight of her pretty mistress.

“Ah, my dear sweet one, I’ve done naught but dream o’ thee all the night, to waken with tears and sighs and ill omens. What time didst come to bed? I heard thee not. Like the unfaithful sentinel, I slept on my watch. God forgive me all my sins!”

“My own dear Margaret,” said Mary, lying down by the side of the old woman; “my dear!”

“Ah, if I only loved thee less, sweetheart—if I only loved thee less!”

“Why? Wouldst thou have betrayed me, then?”

“I think I would, dear one, I think I would,” the old woman replied, stroking the girl’s fair hair. “I fear me, dear mistress, oh, I fear me ’twill not come to good.”

“I know not, dear, but I think it will. It is

only that we have a secret that shall out one day in joy, for, if thou lovest me so to smooth the way, what shall my father say when I ask his forgiveness?"

"Nay, I know not, my love; but my heart is sore, and naught will cure it, I fear me. And yet 'tis but nature; 'tis but the story of a'most every love; and the sweetest morsels are stolen, the sweetest kisses; and I'd die to make thee happy, Mary—ay, my lass, a thousand deaths; but we are poor weak mortals, we that are women, we that love, be it child, or lover, or mistress, and thou hast ever been my love, and 'tis in the nature of things to spoil that which one loveth, sweetheart!"

The old woman took the girl into her arms, and there she lay in silence, as she had lain many a long hour as infant, child, and maiden; and all Margaret's heart beat toward her as a mother's, but without that acute instinct of honor that the true mother feels for the child she has brought to life and nurtured.

"And I prayed that thy father would take to him, oh, so often," crooned the old woman. "And why should he not, since thou lovest him? Was it not enough that thou foundest him worthy, that all the world should not give him a character? And so gentle was he, so soft-spoken, so generous! 'Twas not his fault that he was born under another sun; love makes all the world kin, and even the king has a foreigner for wife, they say, and she be a Papist to boot. But 'tis ever the way, that love must run in

torrents and burst its bounds and dash over rocks and boulders like a mountain torrent. Methinks 'twas Master Clegg that held thy father back from taking to him; and yet we might have waited, chuck, just a little longer! But what is the good to say so now? Nay, sweetheart, cheer thee, it shall all be well; it cannot be thy father shall not listen to me when the time is ripe and thou hast him in a holiday humor, on a birthday—thy mother's, perchance—or even after the dancing at the dressing of the Wells."

Mary said nothing, but lay with her head on the old woman's arm until, a clock striking, she rose, and, kissing the dame's wrinkled face, said, "It is time I was out. Come, Margaret, my dear one, my second mother—"

"God bless thee for that sweet word!" said the old woman, interrupting her.

"Come and help me to dress. I have to take some flowers to Giovanni's studio at the back of the inn; he must finish his great design to-day!"

"Yes, yes," said the old woman, beginning to make her simple toilet, while Mary stole back to her own room and went to her casement once more and looked out, her mind as full of new sensations as the earliest promptings of spring to Dame Nature herself; dreamy longings, a strange fullness of knowledge; and then, a sudden fluttering of the heart and a vague fear, and a sigh for lost innocence, that would not have seemed like a strange sophistication if her father had blessed her and given her away with his own hand. "Ah, why had she not waited?" her

still, small voice whispered; but the reply came as quickly, "I loved him, he wanted me for his wife, I desired him for my husband. 'Whom God hath joined, let no man put asunder!'"

The dew was on every leaf and blade of grass when Mary brushed aside the flowers and foliage of the Manor House garden, plucking at random the rarest blooms and the poorest. Elias Withers, the gardener, met her half-way down the lower walks, by My Lady's Bower, and gave her a hearty "Good-morning," and offered to carry her store of dripping treasures.

"They be a' wet wi' dew, mistress," he said, "and 'tis pity to taint thy gown, so pink and white and fresh it is!"

"Thank you, Withers, thank you," Mary replied; "I don't mind my gown; only get me a few guelder-roses, a peony or so, a bunch of yonder blue and white lupins and a few sprays of monkshood, and I shall make shift to carry them. I am taking them to Signor Ziletto, for his great design of the Manor House Spring."

"A mortal fine thing it be, they say, the few as have seen 'im; like a hangel or summat; but I hoape as Eyam'll come out fust, after all," said the gardener, plucking the flowers she asked for, and making a bouquet of them. "Christopher Newbold, farmer Newbold's son, he that made the temple for Clegg's Well last Ascension, he's thriving wi' his piece, they tell me, and is nigh finished; wi' such blue and crimson and twigs of pine and May-blobs, the like has never been seen for cullur and shapeliness."

"But it is kind of Signor Ziletto to help us, Elias," said Mary.

"Ay, I s'pose it be; but, dang it, mistress, I doan't know as it's foreigner's business; we'n managed to make a show of our own."

"Oh! but we have always welcomed outside aid," said Mary.

"I'm one as doan't care for strangers much, mistress; but I ax pardon, if I be agen your opinion, 'cause there's nowt as I wouldna' gi'e in to, if 'twas you as liked it! And I'm hanged if I 'ud say that o' anybody else!"

"Thank you, Withers," Mary replied, a little flushed. "I am in favor of the foreigners; very much in favor of Signor Giovanni Ziletto; and I want you to be so, Elias, and all the village."

"Very well, then, I'n gotten no more to say. If you favor him, why, of course, whul' village'll do so; it isna' much we can do to make return for kindness you've shown to all on us, young and old, and to the poor and sufferin'; so reckon me on th' side o' the foreigners, though, dang me, it wellnigh busts me to say so!"

"You are very good, Elias. If Sir George should come into the garden and ask for me, tell him I am on the business of the decorating committee."

"Yes, mistress, yes; and thank you kindly," said Elias, watching her as she tripped through the further gate and into the glen.

"She's fond o' goin' back way to village! 'Tis prettiest, they all do say; but gi'e me th' easiest—just straight down the street, and no rocks and stiles to clam' over."

Mary had had her choice of the two ways of life; she had chosen the rocky one—the devious path with stiles to climb and nettles to push through, and thorns for the feet and broken rocks, and darkness when she prayed for light.

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## CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

“THESE FLOWERS ARE LIKE THE PLEASURES OF  
THE WORLD”

It was a remarkable piece of work, Ziletto's Flora, the foundation constructed of wicker and wood, deftly manipulated by the local carpenter, who had never yet worked upon so elaborate a design. He had been amazed to see the figure grow upon his trestle and scantlings, and assume graceful shape and pose. Notwithstanding hostile criticism in Florence, Ziletto was no inferior artist. Flora was a subject he had worked at long ago, though in a bolder and less chaste model than the one he had created for the Eyam festival, inspired by rivalry of Roubillac, as well as a desire to shine in the eyes of Mary Talbot and win him credit with the villagers and the people at the Old Hall. It was a semi-nude figure, draped with a flowing robe of white daisies, fringed with a Greek border of golden buds, that half a score of women and girls had helped to embroider. The cornucopia was filled with flowers and imitation fruits, the face and

bust of the goddess of simple clay with a slight tint of flesh dexterously suggested. In the rough braided hair, a gem of flowers, brooch-like, was conspicuous, and a trail of daisies, with their yellow centers, in the tresses that fell in thick masses about the shoulders; a very clever and effective bit of rough modeling, bold and striking. The archway was a mass of radiant color and an emblazoning of the arms of the Talbot family, with which Sir George had confessed himself mightily pleased; Mary, after much persuasion, having induced her father to visit the studio, and at a time when Ziletto was in the midst of his assistant villagers and the local carpenter. It might not have been intended, but this enabled Mary the easier, when she had been detained from home longer than was usual with her, to say boldly that she had been assisting the artist who had charge of the Manor House Spring.

While Mary was brushing away the dew in her father's garden, and appealing to Elias Withers for his favorable consideration of Ziletto, the Italian was impatient for the coming of Mary. He had dressed himself more like a bridegroom than a modeler of clay or a mosaic-worker in flowers. He was arrayed in a silken doublet and hose, a dainty gold chain about his neck suspending a sparkling gem—some foreign order or an imitation thereof—a velvet cap and feather upon his head, his black hair hanging about his ears. His mandolin was lying upon a bank of flowers, many withered and torn, some fresh and lovely, all simple material for the deco-

ration of the trophy that stood, nearly completed, filling up the ends of the barn with its high-pitched open-timbered roof, but so skillfully put together that it was the next day carried out in a few sections and erected triumphantly.

The gateway of the barn was ajar, as Ziletto had told Mary she would find it; and presently, when she pushed it open with her arms full of flowers, Ziletto sprang forward and had closed and barred it against all comers, ere he took her to his arms, flowers and all, with a passionate embrace.

"My darling, you have come!" he said, with that soft musical accent that had fascinated the English girl the first time he had spoken to her.

She withdrew from his arms for a moment, to lay aside her floral burden, her cheeks aglow with blushes, and then flung herself back into them with the abandon of a Southern beauty, though, to all appearance, she was, as we have seen, a typical product of the colder North.

"My wife!" he exclaimed, and pressed her fair cheek against his own, peach and olive in color; she florid in her healthy loveliness, he dark and sinister to critical eyes, framed to captivate and to deceive.

The air was faint with the luscious perfume of heaped-up flowers and dewy foliage, and all the world a dream; yet one burning thought now dominated Mary's mind. Could they not tell her father? Of course they could, he said; but not yet. Why not keep their holy secret until they were sure their little fault would be con-

doned? Did it not give a new and romantic joy to their happiness? He could say nothing that she did not acquiesce in; every word was music to her soul, but a music that had a delirious sense of pain in its keenest joy.

The half-clad figure of Flora looked down upon them, with her cornucopia and her trailing daisy garment. Pandora's box would have been more appropriate, taking the future into account; a future that already made a faint sound of discordant music in Mary's heart, but too faint for observation, too faint to be heard against the deep, rich, overwhelming and complicated harmonies of her happiness.

Presently, while she half-reclined upon a bank of flowers by the staging of his classic trophy for the Manor House Spring, Ziletto touched the strings of his mandolin and sang to her in a low soft voice one of those Italian lullaby songs, with hushed whispers of love in it and reminiscent murmurings of summer flowers; and the transformed barn became a temple of the gods, a Temple of Love and peace and heavenly forgetfulness.

Thus the time passed on with sunny footsteps; and presently, the villagers, who assisted in the work of adorning the trophy, came tapping at the door. Then Ziletto, taking Mary by the hand, led her to a nook behind the Flora, and bade them return anon, when Miss Talbot should come. As soon as they disappeared, he opened the doorways wide, and Mary came forth and took up her station by the staging, and Ziletto

laughed and kissed her, and made merry over the defeat of his other collaborators; but the subterfuge was a blow to Mary's conscience; a very little blow, perhaps, but she suffered a passing pang of bruised pride and wounded self-respect. The shadow vanished, however, almost as quickly as it had come; and when the bashful maidens returned, with Vicars the tailor, who brought some special buds and blossoms from a Baslow garden, Mary turned to greet them, and Ziletto welcomed them with more than usual formality.

Vicars, with a professional eye, stood still to gaze upon the Italian's new costume—one of his London purchases—short doublet, open in front, without any under-waistcoat, and displaying a rich silken shirt that bulged out from over the waistband of a pair of loose breeches, characteristic of the early days of Charles II., which, as well as the large full sleeve, were counted exceedingly picturesque, with points and ruffles; but Ziletto had discarded the effeminate ruffles below the knee, having in its place a ribbon tied in a true-lover's knot, his shoes similarly adorned and with high red heels.

"Ah, Signor Vicars, you are struck with my new clothes. You have the impulse of the artist."

"I ask your pardon, sir, for admiring them," said Vicars. "I only wish I might have the cut of them."

"And so you shall, with all my heart," said Ziletto. "You are thinking they ill become the

workman, the sculptor in his atelier; but this is a great day, my friend—it is the day on which we complete our labors, and I dressed myself for the great occasion.”

“But to-morrow, signor, is the great occasion, I am thinking,” said Vicars.

“Not for me, sir, not for me,” said Ziletto; “yesterday and to-day are the golden days in my calendar,” and he glanced at Mary Talbot, who turned aside to hide her blushes.

“You have different customs in your country, signor,” said Vicars.

“In some things, yes,” the Italian replied. “The day of consummation is our great day. to-morrow we celebrate; to-day we call upon the gods to seal our work.”

He pointed to the Flora, and chuckled inwardly at his ready fiction; and Vicars said “To be sure, there was sense in that, only they had no gods in Eyam, only One, and it was on Ascension Day they asked His acceptance of their handiwork.”

“Yes, as you say, good Signor Vicars,” Ziletto answered, “different nations have different customs. When I return to my own land it will greatly interest the Florentines and Venetians to hear of the manners and habits of your wonderful England.”

“When you return!” said Vicars. “Ah, we had never thought of that.”

“You pay me a great compliment, Signor Vicars,” said Ziletto.

“We had come to think of you as one who might fix his permanent abode among us.”

"It is very good of you to honor a stranger so highly. Then, you would have me build a villa, and make my home here? Alas! it may not be."

Neither he nor Vicars saw how eagerly Mary Talbot was listening to this dialogue as she leaned against the scaffolding of the Flora, half hidden by the group of girls and women awaiting the artist's directions to resume their work upon the trophy.

"But you are happy, signor, among us? We should be very unhappy, I assure you, if you were to leave us. You see, we have got used to you. At first we did not much care to have foreigners here; but we acknowledge that we were wrong, and we would be willing to have you teach us your arts, and—well, there, I beg pardon, I don't know that I can express myself without seeming too familiar. It is, shortly, that we folk of the Peak have a liking for you and admire you—and it has been somewhat against our will. I know I'm not putting the thing just as I ought; but you will understand our friendly feeling, and all the rest of it."

"Yes, yes, signor," said several women, stepping forward to emphasize what Vicars had said so bunglingly; and Mary Talbot looked on.

"I quite understand," said Ziletto, "and I wish it might be as you are good enough to desire."

"But at least you will not leave us before the feast we mostly call the Wake?"

"And when is the feast that you mostly call the Wake?" asked Ziletto, with an amused smile of patronizing encouragement.

"In August," said Vicars; "only some three months from now."

"August!" said Ziletto thoughtfully; "alas! I must be far away from Eyam long before August."

There was a stifled hysterical cry, and Mary Talbot fell into the arms of her nearest neighbor.

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## CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

### COUNTERS AND PUPPETS, AND MY LADY'S BOWER

It was only a brief moment of unconsciousness that had overcome the village beauty. She rallied before Susan Dakin, the constable's daughter, had pressed a cup of water to her lips.

The general consensus of opinion was that the scent of the zeringa had proved too much for her. Susan Dakin said it was more powerful than lilies or bluebells or gardenia in a close room; but Mary knew they libeled the beautiful flowers when they blamed their perfume for her swooning; and Ziletto knew; and later, when an opportunity arose to whisper in her ear a few reassuring words, she recovered and was her happy self again.

When the dinner hour was over and Mary had returned, a little while before the rest, Ziletto said:

"And didst think I would go without thee, sweet?"

"I did not think; but suddenly my heart stopped beating," she answered.

"You would love my beautiful Florence, caramia; and Florence would love you, my wife," he said, encircling her with his arm.

"But my father?" she said.

"Would take ship with us, and visit your new country."

"Do you think he would?"

"I do not doubt it."

"And should we live in Florence, always?"

"You would not like to leave these native hills and dales, eh?"

"Not for always; but wherever you desired to live, I am your wife to honor and obey," she said with loving devotion.

"We have fetes in Florence, and there are pageants in Venice that would make you think 'twas heaven indeed."

"It would always be heaven with you, Giovanni," said the lovesick girl.

"You are too sweet to me—too gracious," Ziletto answered.

"Oh, if we might tell our father now, and take counsel with him," she answered, with sudden eagerness. "A great darkness all in a moment fell upon my spirits when you talked of leaving Eyam."

"Ah, sweet, I am sorry; but I cannot always stay in Eyam. Even now, I have affairs awaiting me; I have sent my man already to London to delay them until I may arrange to travel."

The frank, open face of the girl, rosy with health a moment before, paled almost to sickness as he spoke again of traveling.

Hitherto she had walked as in a dream, mostly upon flowers, no thought of the morrow except how soon it should bring her to his arms; and now, in the first hours of their secret honeymoon, when he talked of a future that she had never contemplated, ill-omened fancies clouded her brain, and a vague fear oppressed her.

"You would not ask me to go away with you privately—to follow you, perhaps, without my father's knowledge?" she said, with sudden eagerness.

"And if I did, my own, if I did?"

"Oh, Giovanni, don't ask it! For the dear love I bear you, for the honor of my name and yours, for the love and duty I owe to Sir George, my father, don't do that, dear."

"Then I will not," he answered, just a trifle bored with her scruples, and remembering as a point against her how patient he had been with her coyness, until he had overcome it with a formal ceremony in the chapel of the Old Hall, the revelation of which belongs to the future of this history.

"My dear husband!" she said, her arms around him, her kisses upon his lips, all at once thawing the ice that was beginning to form upon the dark pool of his passion.

"You are adorable!" he exclaimed, pressing her to his breast. "Do with me what you will!"

But when she tried to do with him what she would she failed.

It was impossible that his passion for the English beauty could have cooled so soon; and yet,

notwithstanding a solemn and awful compact with Roubillac, it had entered his mind that at the dancing, after the Ascension services, he would solicit the honor of Francesca's hand in the very first measure of the evening.

Vanity, as well as passion, was a factor in this villainy. He would play off one beauty against the other. Francesca's eyes should follow him in the dance when he took the hand of Mary Talbot, and she should look jealously upon him when he danced with her rival of Italy.

There was a certain subtle refinement of selfishness in Ziletto's amours. They were the business of his life. He might have been the hero of one of those old erotic poems that amused the leisure of certain of our wicked forefathers. To Ziletto life was a game, and women the counters and the puppets.

For the time being, however, he humored his village beauty. He swore that life without her would be a desert; that he would risk all and kneel at her father's feet; that nothing should part them. At the moment he half believed what he said; but he had never known so fair and novel a beauty as the village belle of Eyam. Nor was she all unconscious of her charms. She had woman's native gift of coquetry, yet only one humble ambition, and that was to please the man she loved. She had soon forgotten the protesting shrug of his shoulders when first she spoke of her father. Every shred of doubt that had torn her soul at his callous talk of leaving Eyam had vanished with his embraces. It should rather

have been the fiend that looked down upon them from Ziletto's leafy archway, with its daisy-draped figure of Flora, than the image of beauty; though it was suggestive enough to the Italian's inner consciousness that she represented to him only the goddess of the Floralia.

And yet no fire from heaven smote him while he lay in the arms of one who might have emulated the chastity of Diana but for his discovery of her woman's weakness.

It was long after those days that Balzac said, in love a woman is like a lyre, that surrenders her secrets only to the hand that knows how to touch its strings; and De Musset crystalized a common thought into the aphorism that "Happiness may have but one night, as glory but one day." But lust is a classic impulse, and the first woman gave her confidence to the devil. He must have come to her in some such shape as Giovanni Ziletto came to Mary Talbot.

Meanwhile the hours sped on, and long before the early supper-time of those days the decoration for the Manor House Spring was finished.

Ziletto, in the presence of his assistants, made the figure a low bow, and wished it good fortune, and apologized in a mock-merry way to the goddess for taking her to pieces. That had to be done, and it was wonderful to see how cleverly Joe Higgins, the carpenter, did the work. It was not the first Well-dressing he had seen, nor was it likely to be the last, he said.

The several parts of the trophy being laid ready for removal by daybreak, the working company

retired, the girls with arms about each other's waists, as is the habit of girls, Higgins and his apprentices to the Crown and Anchor, Ziletto staying behind to lock the barn, and Mary, by a roundabout way, proceeding homeward.

Ziletto presently overtook her, and when Mary mounted the steps to the meadow that led to My Lady's Bower and the Manor House Garden, he bade her "Good-by until the welcome night," and disappeared down the glen, avoiding the narrow path, that was hateful to him now, because of his encounter with Clegg. He had said nothing of this incident to Mary, nor to any other; except to the one person who alone had his full confidence, and that was himself. He had held much discourse with himself about it, and had vowed a deep revenge.

It could not be, he thought, that he and Clegg would not meet again on the more equal terms of the sword; it had not suited his convenience to accept the challenge Clegg had given him, nor did he desire to have his present amusements shadowed by a possible mishap. It was unlike him to refuse a meeting; unlike him not to seize upon such exercise at once; but Clegg had somewhat shaken his nerve with a sense of unusual physical power; and, moreover, touching the question of revenge, he asked himself what keener revenge could he be enjoying than his triumph over the girl whom Clegg, he could see, would give away his soul to possess. "Or the thing he calls his soul," he said, as he doffed his doublet, and, putting on a simple jerkin, betook

himself toward the Old Hall, walking along the road and taking a cross-cut by the moorland.

As he passed out of the long street he met many pedestrians, horsemen, and people in carts, carriages and wagons entering the village.

Visitors had been coming all day long from various neighboring places, and would go on through the twilight and far into the night.

Almost every house had its guests, and great preparations had been made for their entertainment. If the fare was coarse it was plentiful, and beer flowed like water. It was only in a few houses that foreign liquors were to be had. There were venison pasty, in and out of season, chines of beef, bacon in abundance; and, though the wines of France and Italy were almost unknown among the commonalty, there was hardly a house that had not its gooseberry and its elderberry, not to mention the wine of the cowslip and sparkling herb beers that were deemed nectar by the gentler sex and the young.

The absence of the Bradshaws was much lamented. In the previous year the lady of the Old Hall, then a new-comer with a reputation to make among her neighbors and the people of Eyam, had given much distinction to the festival, bringing with her many guests from London, whose fashions had been the study and wonder of the village ever since; and it was during a conversation with Ziletto concerning certain articles of finery and frippery that the Italian, taking a hint of things Mary had spoken of with admiration, had mentioned them as special pur-

chases to be made by his man in London, and brought post-haste, at any cost, in time for the Ascension.

Pedro had been gone a month, but had not yet been heard from. When commanded on his journey he had urged the many difficulties in the way. These had been smoothed at once with an ample purse.

"But the Plague!" Pedro had said, as a last appeal; for he, too, had his love affair in the village.

"Is at an end," Ziletto had replied, "and thou knowest it. The citizens were returning to their shops, the rich merchants and private people to their houses, even when we passed through London."

And Pedro, who rarely ventured word of doubt of his master's orders or of resistance thereto, had left Eyam, but with a sinking heart and a foreboding of ill. It had seemed to him, as he rode away and looked back upon the mountain village, as if his master's radiant star was more likely to find its eclipse there than to win an added brightness; but Pedro was a good deal of a pessimist, and he had found Emily Radford of the Crown and Anchor inclined to be very amiable.

Sir George Talbot had invited several of his country friends and neighbors to the Manor House. The Old Hall being extended and beautified prevented Lady Bradshaw from coming to Eyam for this present festival, but she had promised to make up for her absence at the Well-

dressing by a special visit for the Wakes in August. Sir George was therefore doing all he could to supply the place of the quality from the Old Hall. The Manor House counted quite a dozen guests, gentlemen and their ladies, and they kept him very busy. He had made ample excuses for Mary. She was the prime mover, as they knew, in the organization of the Well-dressing, and the work this year had been more than usual on account of the allied efforts of the Italians to make the celebration a famous success.

Nevertheless, Mary had managed to sit at the head of Sir George's hospitable table, both at dinner and supper, and had taken part in the evening's amusements until bedtime. They had all retired early, on account of the heavy business of the next day's duties and pleasures. But when the house was asleep, there stole out into the night a cloaked figure watched and guarded to the garden doorway by Mrs. Margaret Dobbs, who on this night was lying with her mistress, giving up her own bed to the servants of the guests, which made it all the easier for Mary (who, in whispers, called herself Signora Ziletto) to steal away to her lover in My Lady's Bower.



## CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR

### WHERE THE PAST AND THE PRESENT MEET

THE next day came to Eyam radiant with sunshine. The genial warmth of it got into the peo-

ple's hearts. They greeted each other with an unusual neighborly cordiality.

There was about the village an aspect of great prosperity. Every window had its pots of flowers, every door was wide open, every step had been newly washed, every hearthstone was white as snow, and in many a grate bunches of flowers or branches of hawthorn had ousted the wood that had been laid for lighting, for cooking or for warmth, as the need might be, should the chill nights not yet be over. There had been snow on summer days in Eyam; but in the Spring and Summer of this history, Nature had been bountiful of sunshine and the fruitful warmth of genial showers.

During the night, and at the earliest dawn, visitors had been arriving. Soon after sunrise several stalls had been erected upon the Green, quaint arrangements under canvas, all mysteriously closed, and not to be opened until the religious ceremonies of the day should be concluded.

Ziletto and his assistants had erected his trophy over the Manor House Spring, that was situated at a green bend of the road, near the entrance to Middleton Dale. It marked a new departure in the Well-dressing, no previous artist having ever attempted the presentation of a figure. From the earliest hour of its appearance a crowd of villagers had gathered about it, noting its reflection in the pool that lay silent outside the spring, that dispersed its surplus waters by a runnel apart from the pool, which the little stream seemed mysteriously to avoid. The waters of the Peak do strange

things; making sudden and unexplained appearances here and there, sometimes bursting forth in a night, to disappear just as strangely.

Roubillac's adornment of Clegg's Well, as we have seen, was more in keeping with local usage than that of Ziletto. It had almost been at the last moment that Ziletto had remembered the necessity of some appropriate motto to complete his design. Mary Talbot suggested the words, "God is Love," to which Ziletto, with a subtle irony that he alone understood, added, "And He created Flora." Of course, Mr. Mompesson only saw in this the Italian's comprehension of the kingdom of flowers, and thought it a very happy inspiration of the stranger.

Roubillac had woven into the facade of his shrine the crest of the Bradshaws, a stag at gaze, under a vine tree—fructed proper; and in a foliated arabesque, that enfolded a Cross, were the words of our Saviour, as recorded by St. John, "If any man thirst, let him come to Me and drink."

It was altogether a design remarkable for its dignity of form and treatment. Reuben Clegg went out early to see what the foreigner should make of the well he had helped to give to Eyam, and he was pleased with it. There was a harmonious blend of color and a nobility of design that appealed to the nature of the man Clegg. It stood firmly upon its pillars, it was even useful: it covered the gushing waters as with a canopy, it supplied a step, and it bordered Nature's fountain with a circle of Nature's flowers.

so disposed as if they had grown there, while everything else in the design made for solidity and permanence of color. The flowers had been treated as material for mosaic-work; Clegg's Well looked like some heavenly shrine on the plains of an imaginary heaven. The sight had soothed Clegg. He carefully avoided Ziletto's work; his heart was too much against him. If the Italian mountebank had only been engaged upon some other of the natural fountains of Eyam, if they must be desecrated by such a hand, he would have been better content.

It also gave Clegg great satisfaction, as it did likewise Elias Withers, Sir George's gardener, to see with what force of character young Newbold and his assistant had come out. They had erected over the Ever-water one of the most ambitious architectural designs that had as yet been seen in Eyam. It had even impressed Roubillac and his art comrades; and Sir George Talbot had dispensed straightaway, the moment he saw it, two gold pieces, to be divided between Newbold and his fellows, and spent in a right merry bowl at the Crown and Anchor when the day should be well over. It was modeled from a Gothic temple--a favorite subject in the modern well-dressings of neighboring villages that still keep the festival of the Ascension. But it had not the remarkable solidity of Roubillac's work, that might in reality have been a fine study in mosaics. Not only had he caught the effect of the Florentine, but he had been able to convey the idea of hardness. His dainty spoils of stamen, pistil

and calyx, became semi-precious stones under his manipulation. He had used a varnish here and there, that might indeed be said, in this case, to have adorned the lily, holding the flower-de-luce with a force stronger than clay, and making it shine with the radiance of enamel.

Now, on the other hand, the Newbold trophy was a design in tapestry. It was a picture cut out—a profile in velvet, a mass of stiffened embroidery, a lovely thing that had been unfolded, and might, the day being over, be packed away and preserved for some other occasion. Every color was represented by heads of flowers pressed into the soft clay, and producing a combination of tints and colors that had the richness of embossed velvet. “O let the Earth bless the Lord!” was the legend of the design, carried out in marsh-marigold, that had the effect of beaten gold, reminding one of a section of the front of St. Mark’s in Venice.

The decorations of the Holy Well and Ham’s Pool, minor springs, were also commendable works of native art; and it was remarked in after years that this was the first time the villagers had gone so far afield as the North Well or the North Brook, to honor the same with floral tribute that is now more famous than all the others; some of which, indeed, have disappeared or become wholly neglected, while this rivulet or well, half a mile from the village green, and almost out of sight of the old church tower, has become famous for all time and under a name not then at all celebrated, but which has become

not only historic on paper, but in fact. The Manor House Spring has been absorbed in other underground streams, but Mompesson's Well, or Mompesson's Rivulet, is one of the sights of Eyam. Little did the rector or his flock dream of the destiny of the well they went out to decorate for the first time in those days of the Talbots and the Bradshaws. and the strangers within their gates.

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## CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR

*(Continued)*

Undisturbed by the whistle of the locomotive, away from the highroad of travel, Eyam is still, in this year of grace 1896, a secluded hamlet of the hills; and the chief landmarks of this history are as fresh and real to-day as they were in 1665. Not the faintest echo of the railway ever reaches Eyam. The cottages in which Dakin and Vicars, and the rest lived, are still existing. If the Manor House has been rebuilt and called Eyam Hall, it has, nevertheless, all the characteristics of the original, and makes a claim upon the imagination to which the dullest intellect must respond. The church tower continues to be a notable landmark of the wooded hillside, and My Lady's Bower has left its landmarks. The Old Hall has not wholly perished. A portion of the Eastern end, that was built by Lady Bradshaw, is still standing. What is left contains a noble fireplace, the mantels recessed and enriched with deeply indented molding. To-day it is used as a barn, and is mentioned to the casual tourist as a modern appendage of the Old Hall; it had been

intended to hang it with tapestry. Within the recollection of a villager still living, and with whom the present historian has had many talks, the tapestry lay in a heap in certain corners of the old building, where it rotted away.

So real in its age and simplicity is this hamlet of the High Peak Hundred, with its ancient Cross, its walled-in gardens, its umbrageous timber, its running waters, its Tudor Manor House, its treasured relics of the martyrdom of its village heroes, the whole surrounded by the everlasting hills, that it requires no great strength of fancy to conjure up the gay procession of the Ascension Day that is chronicled in these pages, and to hear the music of the three or four chiming bells, the bass of which was destined later to an unusual and solemn activity. Indeed so sensibly does the past and the present meet here, that yesterday seems to mingle with to-day. Eyam has stood still, as its neighbor, Tis-sington, has; both strangers to the prosaic sounds of the railway whistle, each hugging its past, Eyam in a gloomy attitude of pride; and you shall find its old men as ready to talk of its long-past tribulation as if these records were a matter of last week. So powerfully stirred is the imagination when in constant association with deathless scenes, that a certain inhabitant of the slumberous old place, a chance acquaintance of the writer, thinks he almost remembers the occurrence of certain incidents of this history, though they belong to a period nearly two hundred years before he was born. When he is reminded of

this inconsistency, his wrinkled face lights up with a knowing smile, and he poses you by pointing to the houses where the people of those days lived, the house where the clothes were unpacked that brought the trouble, as he calls it; and when I tell him what he has not yet heard of the story of Clegg and the Italians, he puckers up his eyes and reflects upon it, sitting on his doorstep in the sunshine, and says it may be all true enough, he'd always had a sort of glimmering of it, and, furthermore, that "the heavens declare the glory of God and the firmament showeth His handiwork."

Old age shall tremble in its wits, and the eyes shall see vaguely as through a cloud, and faint tokens of the past shall be veiled in a half-remembered perfume; but great deeds outlive tombstones, and romance is a flower that springs with perennial freshness, though its environment be a ruin, its roots familiar with a corpse.

"Time, Time, his withering hand hath laid  
On battlement and tower,  
And where rich banners were displayed  
Now only waves a flower."

Seek not to dig it up and set it in your own narrow garden; be content to tell its story. The finderne's tiny blossoms were brought from the Holy Land by the Derbyshire crusader, Sir Geoffrey. For three hundred years after he and his very mansion had become as nothing, there grew the finderne's flower until a selfish hand uprooted it and replanted it in a private

garden, and fenced it round about from the great world, and so it withered and died; but its memory lives in story and in song, by reason whereof we also know the name of Sir Geoffrey, who was a remote ancestor of Sir George Talbot in this romance.

By the same token shall Eyam be remembered; the more, perchance, for these new flowers of romance that are herein planted round about the gray-leaved rosemary of a bitter remembrance.

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## CHAPTER TWENTY-FIVE

### HOLY THURSDAY AND THE DRESSING OF THE WELLS

AND the people of Eyam, and for miles round about, gathered together, and it was a great day in the mountain village.

The visitors trooped in from Curbar, Calver, Foolow, Stony Middleton, and even from Dronfield, Baslow and Bakewell, and still further afield; for the Well-dressing of Eyam was of a widespread celebrity throughout the northern part of Derbyshire, and the advent of the Italian artists had given a new interest to the festival.

Early in the forenoon a motley and picturesque crowd, such as has rarely been seen in English town or village, promenaded the streets, and made critical and admiring view of the flowering wells. The dresses of both men and women were a mixt.

ure of the Puritan and the Royalist. Many of them had taken little heed of the changes from one reign to the other, living outside the world, as they had done for many a long year, they and their fathers before them. The higher nobility of the Hundred, who were represented in the throng, though sparsely, had donned their short cloaks and doublets, their silk stockings, and felt hats and feathers.

There were others who indulged in a discreet compromise between the Puritan soldier and the Royalist cavalier; and others who wore their simple civilian gowns and Geneva bands. Sir George Talbot made a gallant show, and the constable carried his staff of office. One old lady, attended by a servant-man no less oddly attired, came in her great fardingale of the days of Elizabeth and James, and was an object of respectful wonder. There were the ordinary commonalty of women in their simple gowns and hoods, adorned, now and then, with extra ribbons, some with ruffs, and some with simple collars; but all rosy and of modest mien.

Mary Talbot, leaning upon the arm of her father, was a fascinating picture of young womanhood. She was somewhat fantastically attired, her rich brown hair escaping in curls from a dainty miniver cap fastened with a pearl-headed gold pin. The fan at her girdle hung like a jewel upon her satin gown, and her gauntleted gloves were finely embroidered, as was also her bodice. It was instinctive with Mary Talbot that she considered her figure in her toilet, her small well-

poised head, her delicate if well-rounded bust, her shapely figure rather full at the hips, giving an idea of strength and generous proportions. She was what in all times would be called a fine woman; but with a certain dignity of refinement that comes of an ancestry of rare breeding.

She and her father had pleasant words for everybody. They examined the Well-dressing together. Only Clegg noticed in the expression of Mary's usually happy countenance an unwonted pensiveness. He thought her smile was forced. She did not look people so steadfastly in the eye as heretofore. Clegg only noticed this in a furtive way, for he did his best to avoid her, but wherever she might be, within sight or hearing, he felt her presence; it stirred his emotions as the wind upon an *Æolian* harp, and it softened him.

Poor Mary carried her secret with fear and hope. She played her part with all the natural skill of her sex, but she felt that she did not play it well; she longed to take her father aside, away from the crowd, and fling herself upon his neck and weep, all the time watchful for the coming of Ziletto and his Italian compatriots. He had told her how they would appear in procession together; how he had obtained the good Father's permission to be one of them. She knew that he and Signor Roubillac were not on intimate terms, and that he only maintained a show of comradeship with the rest; but she had every reason to believe that he and Father Castelli were the best of friends

Clegg was a striking figure in the throng. "He's a fine-looking fellow," was Sir George's comment; but he had to repeat it before Mary nodded her indorsement of the remark. Just at the moment Mrs. Clegg appeared. She had evidently come into the village alone, and was looking for her son. Always neatly and becomingly dressed, on this morning of the Ascension Mrs. Clegg had given, with her neighbors, special attention to her toilet. She wore a tall hat of a grayish felt, a silk gown of similar tone, frilled cuffs matching with her white full ruff, and her brown untanned shoes were adorned with silver buckles; these latter being an heirloom, as was Clegg's sword. In the technical slang of modern art, she might have been called a study in gray.

Mrs. Clegg presented herself to Sir George and Miss Talbot with a modest curtsy, and in her soft, clear voice exchanged with them the common courtesy of passing comments on the weather, that are in our own time artful aids to conversation.

Mary Talbot made a point of shaking hands with Reuben's mother, and asking if she were not expecting to meet her son, and pointing out where he stood, at some distance, talking to Vicars the tailor.

The dear old lady thanked her, and made for the spot where her son towered above the group of villagers and guests, not so much by his height, though he was more than ordinarily tall, but by reason of his striking personality. He wore a suit of black cloth, trimmed with velvet, trunk

hose, a scarf about his waist, long boots and a brown hat with a silver clasp, in which, by way of tribute to Royalist fashion, he had stuck an eagle's feather. But that he was a far finer figure, he might have been the late Protector himself in the fashion of his clothes, and he wore close to his side a sword, the first time it had been seen there; it was the weapon his father had carried and used with conspicuous effect in defense of the Crown. Besides his feather, the trim and cut of his light brown beard was another concession to the new reign, pointed at the chin, though eschewing the mustache.

The contrast between Sir George in his Royalist clothes and Reuben Clegg in his more somber suit was very notable, and helped to give picturesque form and color to the village throng. His doublet was of blue satin, fitting rather closely to the figure, in shape not unlike the fatigue jacket of a modern artilleryman. He had eschewed the usually loose sleeve for a moderately cut straight one, with ruffles at the wrist, and he carried his gloves in his right hand. Neither did he affect the short cloak which was sported by one or two of the neighboring gentry in great style. He wore a lace collar, silk breeches to match his doublet, and a pair of soft high boots, his rapier swinging from a plain baldrick. His headgear was a Flemish beaver with a drooping feather, almost the color of his bushy gray hair. His mustache was newly barbered, and had the cavalier curl, his small gray beard the imperial point.

There was in Sir George's manner something of the gayety and spirit usually associated with the Royalist dress—the hearty laugh, the dash and go of the king's reckless followers; though Sir George toned down these characteristics, that were the outcome of his natural bonhomie, in deference to his magisterial capacity. He carried a tall walking-stick, in its way almost as imposing as the constable's staff of office.

The working population of Eyam consisted of Clegg's miners and a few weavers; besides, of course, the ordinary traders, farmers and tailors, the latter some dozen, most employed by Vicars, who was honored by orders from many of the dignitaries of the Hundred. Once or twice a year he had parcels of patterns, of textiles and of ready-made garments of the latest fashions, from London. The toilers of the district were in their Sunday clothes; the miners chiefly distinguished by their leather jerkins, the weavers and others in simple cloths, nearly all with belts or girdles that carried a knife, or, as in the case of tradesmen, often a memorandum book.

In and out of the throng children and young people passed to and fro dressed very much after the fancy and means of their parents; everybody, male and female, young and old, from the standpoint of our own times, looking more or less theatrical, which, by the way, is too often used as a term of reproach.

But the scene was not complete until the Italians entered the village in a glittering procession of many colors, the good father at their head in

the simplest of robes, but with his great gold and ivory Cross about his neck. Ziletto in purple velvet and silken hose, with a jeweled-hafted Spanish sword hanging from a magnificent sword-belt, worn sashwise over the right shoulder after the manner of Sir George's baldrick, but so embroidered and enriched with gems that it was the one conspicuous thing in his costume. He walked by the side of the priest, his swarthy complexion shining in the sun, his eyes under the dark lashes bright as the jewel at his neck—a remarkable figure, lithe of limb and alert of manner. We, who know of that encounter between him and Clegg, can only wonder that, backed with such dexterous knowledge and skill of fence, he should not have overcome his enemy.

As Ziletto leisurely marched into the village with his compatriots, Clegg stood apart on a little rising ground and watched him with cold, not to say malevolent, eyes. He did not see Mary, who, with her father, stood within the low sweeping branches of a darkening beech; nor did Sir George note the beating of her heart, though she clung closer to his arm, as, in the distance, could be heard the music of the approaching instrumentalists making their way from Calver by the glen.

The Italian procession pressed on to the Green and there broke up, each member, man and woman, making for the Wells, to criticise the rival decorations, Francesca, with a drooping veil, something like a corona that might have been worn by a princess of the blood, walking by the

side of Roubillac, her hand in his, the rich gold brocade of her trailing gown a wonder of textile perfection. Roubillac held his head high and carried himself with an acted repose of mind, for his soul was even more troubled than that of Mary Talbot, not only by reason of the gnawing pangs of jealousy and hatred of Ziletto, but on account of the unholy compact and conspiracy that his mad unreasoning love had induced him to enter into, a sacrifice of more than honor and an act of selfish folly beyond all palliation.

Roubillac and Francesca were viewing Newbold's Gothic design, when Ziletto took occasion to address them with great show of deference and to compliment Roubillac upon his ornamentation of Clegg's Well. All the time his dark eyes were upon the angelic face of Francesca, who observed a demure demeanor, while Roubillac felt the hot blood rush through his veins, and the old murderous thought he had confessed to Pisani, the swordsman, once more leaped into his mind.

"We thank you, Signor Ziletto," said Roubillac, with all the patience he could command, "and would prefer to be left to our own society and to our own thoughts."

Francesca heard the words without seeming to do so, and Ziletto, with a bow, replied:

"Signor Comrade, I had hoped we were friends, if not in very truth at least in outward show; behold, these boorish English are watching us, a staring open mouthed group of them, and beneath yonder tree, also looking this way, are Sir

George Talbot and the lady herself whom they call the beauty of Eyam."

Ziletto gabbled on to prevent Roubillac bursting out with the reply of repudiated friendship that was on his lips, and at the mention of Mary Talbot, Francesca came down from the skies, and turned her face in the direction of the spot where Sir George and Mary were standing. Sir George, noting the movement, said, "Come, Mary, we must go and speak to these people," and Mary, her heart beating wildly, suffered herself to be led into the open. The Italians faced them, Sir George doffing his plumed hat, the Italians gracefully acknowledging the salutation, the two ladies curtseying to each other with great formality, Roubillac formally presenting his wife to Miss Talbot, Sir George as formally presenting Mary. The others had met before. Ziletto responded to Sir George's congratulations upon his work no less gravely than Roubillac on similar grounds, for Sir George was eloquent in praise of both Clegg's Well and the Manor House Spring.

The two women examined each other with undisguised curiosity. They both took each other into their critical consciousness before they spoke a word. Francesca was impressed on Mary Talbot's mind as a strangely wild and beautiful personality, that was only heightened by close perusal of her dark face, though Mary found it difficult to keep her eyes away from her splendid gold brocade and a trinket studded with various gems pendent from a delicately woven

gold chain about her neck. Francesca, notwithstanding the impulse of jealousy that Ziletto had purposely aroused in her, found the fair face of the English girl full of a simple, frank, healthful beauty that invited confidence and did not suggest rivalry. The two women liked each other at sight; their hearts went out one to the other, and Mary began to talk with a freedom that brought a happy but questioning smile to the ruddy lips of the woman of Verona. She could, however, only speak a few words in English, but to her aid came Roubillac, ostentatiously taking the words of interpretation out of the mouth of Ziletto, whose bitter glance of annoyance was promptly changed to a politic smile. He turned to Sir George, with the remark that his friend and compatriot, Signor Roubillac, had learned English of the famous tutor of the Valieros at Venice, "and speaks it admirably, do you not think so?"

"I wish I could speak Italian half as well," said Sir George, at the same time, with a glance toward the church, remarking: "The rector is assembling his parishioners; the procession is about to be formed; the band of the Hundred is taking its place; we must take our places too, ladies; but let us consider this present meeting only adjourned."

Then the Italians bowed to the English knight and his daughter; they responded, and Mary, with a parting glance of love at Ziletto (who was occupied in trying to catch the eye of Francesca), walked away to join the crowd that was

now being marshaled by the constable and the committee of churchmen and villagers.

The rector was in his surplice, and not far away, in the midst of a small group of cloaked and very soberly-dressed supporters, the ejected minister, the late rector, George Stanley, was seen in his dark vestments of the Puritan order, over which he wore, in honor of Calvin and to assist the decorative character of the procession, a Geneva cloak.

Mr. Stanley was an old man, his hair long and thick, a grizzled gray, and his beard was untrimmed. He wore a skullcap, and carried a Bible in his hand. The Orthodox party thought Mr. Stanley would have been wise to have taken his part in the procession without any ecclesiastical display, seeing that he had been inhibited from his holy office, and that it was a crime for him and his followers to meet together for public or even private worship; but Eyam, as we have seen, was tolerant of these things. Moreover, Mr. Stanley was held in great esteem; he had borne adversity with humility and resignation; and, moreover, even Papistry was not as yet hung and drawn and quartered as in later days in the Hundred of the High Peak, though the time came when it paid dearly for its own persecutions in the Peak. These tragedies, however, do not belong to these present records; and the band is already filling the sonorous air with the strains of a processional march.

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## CHAPTER TWENTY-SIX

LOOKING back upon that remarkable procession and the crowd of spectators, the village life of our own day is singularly prosaic by comparison.

Derbyshire folk are strange people even now; have oddly characteristic ways; speak not only a curious dialect, but in antiquated idioms; and in districts outside railways, often adhere to the habits and dress of a remote past. Smock-frocks, clogs, pattens, swallow-tailed coats, short capes in the daytime, are still common; and Wellington boots, high stocks, and leggings in all weathers, are not deemed unfashionable where fashion is unknown.

What wonder then, if, two hundred years ago, the people of the Peak were in many cases behindhand with the tailoring and millinery of Charles and his queen?

It was an unconventional procession as regards marching order. The people and local dignitaries fell in how they pleased, after the constable had taken the lead followed by the band.

The latter were attired in ordinary civilian dress, with the exception of a uniform hat and feather. The drummer, it is true, wore his military uniform. He had beaten the charge in more than one Royalist victory.

Among the processionists were a few disbanded soldiers. They wore their breastplates,

that flashed back the rays of the sun. There was a royal standard bearer. The gold of his flag shone out regally. Around his banner floated a dozen smaller flags carried by Eyamites, whose ranks were varied by village maidens, dressed in their best and each carrying a bouquet.

Sir George Talbot attended by his clerk, and the rector in his surplice and attended by his clerk (the "Amen man," as they called him), were in the procession; as were also Clegg's miners and the few weavers, tailors and tradesmen of the village, each company with its tiny banner, suggesting in a small way the dignity of a trade guild. It was, indeed, all in a small way, compared with the pageantry of a great city; but it was singularly picturesque. The tail end of the parade was brought up by the visitors, or any other persons who chose to follow. Among those who thus fell in were many locally notable persons, several of them men and women in the costume of the Tudors; the men in their slashed doublets, open at the breast to show their lawn shirts, the women attired after the manner of the old lady already mentioned, in fardingales and tall head-dresses.

Outside the pageant, but unconsciously forming a feature of it for historical note, stood the Italians in their gay attire, and the solemn little group of Presbyterians surrounding their ejected pastor, Mr. Stanley. These, however, were on fairly good terms with the Mompesson people, and exchanged greetings as the procession passed

by. They formed an effective background for the dresses and sallow faces of the Italians, who presently walked at a little distance from the procession, and paused at the Wells to listen to the blessing offered up by the Rev. George Mompesson. They stood bareheaded, with reverential respect. Ziletto, his cap in his hand, had stationed himself by the side of the priest, and commented upon the simplicity of the scene. What would Florence, what would Venice have made of such a festival? And he pictured the city fathers in their gorgeous robes, the soldiers and sailors in theirs, maidens scattering flowers, banners of brilliant hues, Father Castelli foremost in the pageant, the banners of the Cross preceding the great dignitaries of the Church, their holy regalia vying in grandeur with that of the Civic Guilds of Italy, the vestments of her great dignitaries outshining the rarest trophies of the noblest gardens. Nevertheless, the esthetic emotions of their compatriots were stirred by the simple beauty of the English scene; and the hearts of the natives were deeply moved in the service that followed beneath the roof of the parish church, that was ancient even then. They listened, with something of a new-found understanding, to the simple eloquence of the new pastor, who brought down to them, through the ascended Christ, a heaven upon earth, dwelling upon the impression the earth had made upon Christ Himself, how He loved it, His delight in gardens, how He prayed among the flowers, His Sabbath day rambles at harvest,

His tribute to the beauty of the lily of the field, His humanity, how He feasted with humble dignity among the poor, His love of children.

It was a strange sermon, the people said, because it wanted no learning to understand it; and it made out that folk need not be miserable if they were religious; that God did not give them beautiful flowers, the mountain and the moor, the river and the spring, the music of pure waters and the blessings thereof, to be wretched about. He gave them for their good enjoyment and each other; He made them neighbors for comfortable society, and the seasons for variety of beauty and use; and it was a happy and beautiful coincidence that brought about the celebration of the Ascension at this time of flowers and full springs. Christ had told them to take no thought for the morrow, which He interpreted as a message of Faith in the Mercy and Justice and Love of the Father; and with the parable of the lilies that are arrayed more beautifully than Solomon in all his glory, he moved them to think of the certainty that, however dark the night, the sun would shine on the morrow, however sterile the winter, spring would surely follow—spring and summer, and autumn with her fruits and corn and all her store of wealth for the winter barns and threshing-floors. And then he encouraged them to a full justification of dance and song, and such joyous exercise as belonged to honest festival, with the Scriptural declaration that there is a time for all things; and this was their time to rejoice and be glad.

And there had not, in the remembrance of the oldest inhabitant, been such gayety after service on Ascension Day as upon this memorable occasion.

After church the villagers returned to their homes, and there they feasted their guests, with right honest food and drink; and all the afternoon the men sat in the doorways or under the trees, and smoked their pipes, and the women gossiped and compared notes on the gowns they most admired.

Mary Talbot sat at the head of her father's table. Ziletto joined in the feast at the Crown and Anchor, to which he had contributed its rarest feature, sundry bottles of white wine.

Mr. Stanley and his flock broke bread together in the humble abode of the Widow Steadfast, and lamented the extravagance of the times and the ungodliness thereof.

Reuben Clegg and his mother entertained several guests with generous hospitality.

The Italians returned to the Old Hall, and made merry in the refectory thereof.

On the village green the stalls and booths were open to the wondering gaze of the young people.

Sir George Talbot feasted the bandsmen and many others in the great barn of the Crown and Anchor, sending for that purpose two mighty venison pasties from his own kitchen and several barrels of old ale.

Mr. Clegg provided dinner for his miners in the garden of his headman's cottage; and by

noontide, Eyam was one scene of feasting and good comradeship.

Above the joyousness of the time, and while the sunshine was most divine, the air filled with the perfume of the flowers and exclamation of a proper mirth, the shadow of a tragedy hovered over the village; and it overcast the dancing. No one saw it, or dreamed of it, except one man; though beneath an outward show of joy two hearts beat sadly to the measure of their own pathetic music.

None were more envied or admired that day, for their beauty and their fine clothes, than Francesca Roubillac and Mary Talbot; none were so unhappy.

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## CHAPTER TWENTY-SEVEN

### THE DANCING, AND AFTERWARD

It was the devil in Ziletto's nature that inspired him to incite these two women to an unnatural jealousy, the devil whose poison was vanity and lust.

The dancing began shortly before sunset, and was continued into the twilight, the green having been mown and swept and rolled for the purpose every day for a month prior to the festival. The booths and stalls on the edge of the turf were cut off with a fence of ropes.

A rough kind of wooden inclosure was erected close by the village cross for light refreshments,

and the musicians were elevated upon a platform of timber. The measures were simple, some of them quite formal, others a merry kind of barn-romp, with quaint figures; and now and then a solo or a duet was contrived in order to show off the step-dancing of local experts.

While Ziletto appeared to be in full attendance upon Miss Talbot, when the dancing began he suddenly took the opportunity to withdraw from her in favor of one of the most distinguished of the visitors, and made straightway to Francesca, whose hand he solicited for the first measure, which was a country dance, not unlike what a country dance is to this day. Signora Roubillac had observed with what homage Ziletto had presented himself to Miss Talbot, how he seemed to humble himself to her father, and how Mary's eyes had lighted up with undisguised pleasure the moment Ziletto had appeared upon the Green.

Roubillac had stepped aside to speak to Sir George Talbot, and turning to conduct his wife forward, in response to Sir George's expressed desire to make her his partner in the inaugural dance of the festival, had the mortification to see her moving to her place escorted by Ziletto. Roubillac thereupon invited the wife of one of his compatriots to be his vis-a-vis, and her husband, with the grace of his nation, swept the ground with his hat as he bowed to Miss Talbot, and was accepted by the English belle, whose eyes, however, followed Ziletto.

Gradually the two lines of dancers were filled, the males on one side, the females on the other.

Mr. Mompesson and his wife were present. His presence was a good influence, though it suppressed nothing of the honest mirth of the time. There was the usual laughter over mistakes and the contretemps that invariably occur in a round dance where many are engaged. Mrs. Clegg had induced Reuben to take part with the rest. It was under her influence that Clegg had dressed himself so impressively. But he insisted upon having his mother for his partner. It was a pleasant sight to see the tall, serious-looking, manly fellow taking the Quaker-like old dame with faultless steps through the measure, leading her backward and forward, and up and down, now to part and unite again. More than once his hand and Mary's touched; and the contact thrilled him. Then Mary found her hand in Ziletto's, and her face flushed, to pale again as she saw with what ardor he carried off Francesca in the whirling maze.

"Nay, if he kill me, I cannot but love thee," Ziletto had whispered in Francesca's ear; and she in return had responded with a gentle taunt of his evident passion for the English beauty. He had whispered with a scornful smile that a stranger in this barren spot must have amusement.

Francesca found herself forgetting all the world except her partner. Though she did not look at him she felt that his eyes were riveted upon her; that they searched her very soul; her feet seemed to move mechanically in the dance, but with a strange lightness.

Once or twice she saw the face of Mary Talbot flit by; and though there was only a pathetic expression in Mary's countenance, Francesca saw it as one of defiance and triumph.

The old time came back to her, when first she saw Ziletto in Venice and had felt what it was to love. For good or ill, Ziletto had been the first to stir Francesca's maiden heart. She had met him thrice, once by accident, twice by appointment, before it came into her mind to resist him, before she confessed to Father Lorenzo, and then to her husband; and now, all in a moment, Ziletto had revived that first dizzy sense of love or passion, whichever it may be called, that had come to her after she had married Roubillac, which she had done out of pity or complaisance or gratitude, or for the reason that she admired Roubillac's art and he had begged so hard. Before the dance was finished, Ziletto had won from her a promise to meet him the next day; and, though one must do her the justice to say that before the night was over she repented and resolved not to meet him, all the mischief was done.

Roubillac, conducting his little Italian countrywoman through the dance, had appeared to be absorbed in the music; but he had kept a careful watch on Ziletto, and had overheard the result of his rival's proposal.

Meanwhile swinging through the dance, Sir George Talbot and his partner were conspicuous for their agility, as were Mr. Mompesson and his wife for their formality. Sir George had

honored Miss Dakin, the constable's daughter, by taking her as his partner; and his guests had found no difficulty in finding comely and desirable companions.

It was a right joyful dance. The ball once open, the fun waxed hot and the air was full of laughter. The rector withdrew after a while, and so likewise did the more sedate of the villagers and friends; but Ziletto and Miss Talbot continued among the party until it became a moonlight dance, strange shadows seeming to take part in it, the shadows of the elms and the poplars, bats now and then gyrating in a weird flight overhead. Reuben Clegg had, however, taken his mother home. Sir George had left his daughter in charge of a squire of Baslow.

At the first opportunity, as the twilight faded into the moonlit night, Roubillac had withdrawn his wife, without a word spoken on either side. He took her hand with a grip that was strong and imperative, and she knew he had divined what had passed. It was her misfortune only to be strong and frank and dutiful when she was by his side. She felt safe and happy with him; happy in a subdued, childish way. He was her protector. There was nothing he would not do for her, nothing he could not do, except to free her from the power of Ziletto, the moment that master of hearts chose to put out his strange, unholy power. More than once during the dancing she had felt a desire to rush to her husband for protection; but Ziletto's eyes held her, his touch was a fetter that had magic in it.

a something she could not resist. There was a music in his voice that had the power to charm away all the world but himself; it was as if she dreamed a dream of music and flowers, and angel voices and peace.

"I could not help it, Bernardo—I am sorry, and do repent me," she said, as they passed under the trees into the roadway, where one of Lady Bradshaw's quaint vehicles, which they called chariots at Eyam, was in waiting. It had brought Francesca to the dancing, and Roubillac had given the postilion a gold piece to keep his horses in the shafts and wait until the signora should be ready to return. Roubillac would not have her fatigued, or run the risk of walking through the dewy night across the meadow and moorland path, which the others found so lovely on this still, sweet night of the early summer.

"What did happen, Francesca?"

"Nay, thou knowest," she replied; "and it grieves me to the heart."

She leaned her head upon his shoulder.

"Again, dearest, I ask what did happen?"

"I saw your dear pained face as the words fell from my lips; I know that you heard them. I am a most unhappy woman. Why does God make that which is beautiful to be a snare to our feet?"

"We will leave this place, Francesca."

"I care not," she said.

"Will you go?"

"Oh, yes, anywhere; what matters where?"

"Do you mean that wherever you go you love that man?"

Roubillac spoke with a pitying accent, as if he addressed a child—a daughter rather than a wife.

"Our Blessed Mary forgive me! I do not know what it is; but, oh, until this night I swear he had gone out of my thoughts. Oh, Bernardo, how you must hate me!"

"Hate you? My love, my blessing, there is nothing in the world you could do that would make me hate you! My God! I believe if yonder ruffian were an honest man, kindly, worthy, with a heart and some shred of conscience, and you said it was for your happiness, I could give you up to him—if I killed myself afterward. But he is a fiend, a wretch; 'twere to dishonor the beasts of the field to liken him unto one of them. Oh, but I am rightly served, miserable sinner that I am!"

"How rightly served? How a miserable sinner?" said Francesca. "Thou art the noblest and truest man I have ever known, not forgetting my own father, God rest his soul!"

"Come to thy chamber," said Roubillac, when they had reached the Old Hall. "Where is thy woman?"

"Here, worthy signor," said the devoted servant, who had followed them up the stairway.

"Be careful of thy mistress; she is fatigued," said Roubillac, addressing the woman. "I will return to the village, and see to the well-being of our compatriots."

By the time he reached the village, the dancing was at an end. The last strains of the music had died away. The booths and stalls were closed. The bats and night owls had the Green all to themselves. A lamp was burning before Roubillac's trophy at Clegg's well. The water was running into the great basin with a soothing sound. The dim light gave to the dressing of the spring the effect of a holy shrine. Roubillac paused for a moment, as if only to sigh. Lights gleamed in many of the cottage windows. Roubillac found that most of his people had wandered homeward. He stood for a while outside the Crown and Anchor, where a group of villagers had congregated. Ziletto had been induced to favor a few of the more influential persons of the village with a song. They sat, open-mouthed, like beings in a dream. Orpheus, with his lute, might have been exercising his magic upon them.

"A godless, impenitent miserable!" said Father Castelli, coming out of the shadow of the trees close by, and taking Roubillac's arm. "Nay, I know thou art thinking so!"

"You here, my father!" said Roubillac, as the priest led him away.

"I came with thine own purpose, my son—to see if all our friends had gone home to their beds, and they have, like the good creatures they are. A more gentle, lovable flock no unworthy priest was ever blest withal."

"It is a night for meditation," said Roubillac.

"Come, then, and let us commune with each

other," replied the priest, "so shall we finish this interesting day worthily. Ah, my son, if these people were only within the pale!"

It was indeed a night, it would seem, for cogitation. Reuben Clegg stood aside, by the old cross, that he might not be noted by Roubillac and the priest. Clegg had been invited to sup with Sir George, but had declined the proffered hospitality.

When his mother had said her prayers and retired to rest, Reuben had sallied forth and walked back to the village. He had paused by the Manor House. There were lights in almost every window. He had avoided, as much as possible, being seen by any one; though the constable had noted him on the other side of the road, watching the Crown and Anchor and listening to the singing of the Italian.

Clegg walked past the church and the Green and back again, as if uncertain of purpose.

By degrees the village lights disappeared; and it was evident that at the Manor House they were going to bed. The gardener had, indeed, been requisitioned to lend Sir George's man a hand in assisting the guests to bed. The ladies had retired soon after supper, which had been served at an unusually late hour. The men had sat over their cups until nearly eleven o'clock, and more than one of them was literally under the table.

It would be at about the time that the last man had staggered to his couch, when Ziletto, cautiously opening his chamber window, looked

out into the night. A few clouds had beaten up from the west, now and then obscuring the moon. Beneath the window of the Crown and Anchor's best and indeed only guest chamber, was the fringe of a flower garden that straggled into vegetables and ended in a ragged orchard. It was a comparatively short drop from the window to the ground. Any one making use of the window instead of a door was not impeded by an overhanging sill. There was a deep ledge inside. The window was heavily recessed in the wall. Ziletto climbed into the recess; then, dropping his cloak, quietly followed it with an easy facility that betokened practice of the feat. He came to the ground rather heavily, but without any real inconvenience. On retiring to rest, which he had done before all the inn's guests had smoked their last pipes, he had ostentatiously warned them to make no noise, for he was fatigued and hoped for a good night's sleep. They had all wished him pleasant dreams and taken the hint to go home. Mrs. Radford had soon afterward heard Ziletto fasten his door and retire, she and the rest of the house soon following the Italian's example.

As he stood beneath the window, gathering up his cloak, he smiled to think how tamely the natives had behaved. On such a night as this in Venice, and with the lilt of the dance still in their heels and the sound of the music in their ears, they would have braved the daylight ere they had ceased their revels.

Ziletto paused for a moment, as if he waited

for the moon to show herself and light him on his way. Suddenly Night's Lamp appeared in a wide patch of blue sky, and the Italian, humming one of his favorite love songs, passed through the orchard, climbed the low fence, and took the shortest path toward My Lady's Bower.

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## CHAPTER TWENTY-EIGHT

### THE TRAGEDY OF "MY LADY'S BOWER"

As Giovanni Ziletto entered the path that led to Sir George Talbot's little estate, with its gardens and meadow, Reuben Clegg passed that way. They were not near enough to recognize each other, but each suspected who the other was. Ziletto sheltered himself beneath an overhanging rock, that was white in the moonlight but black in shadow. Clegg stood in the middle of the path, some hundred yards away, to see who should emerge into the light. He waited for some few minutes without any result, and then went on his way. Ziletto came forth cautiously from his hiding-place, and climbed the steps that led through the meadow to My Lady's Bower. He stooped low as he came to the gate. That it was only on the latch was the signal of the coast being clear. He passed into the lower garden, looked about him cautiously, and tapped three times at the door. It was immediately opened and he disappeared within the portals, as the moon shone out full on the figure of Clegg, who

was walking toward Eyam by the path where he had seen, as he believed, the figure of Ziletto.

An hour later Mary Talbot drew the casement of My Lady's Bower. She and Ziletto sat for some time, silently looking out upon the night. There was no fear of the lovers being disturbed or seen from that quarter.

The arbor was not only secluded, but it could not be approached except through the gate that Ziletto locked as he passed into the Talbot domain.

Mary's woman, Mrs. Dobbs, kept watch and ward at the house, should Sir George by any chance be stirring. Not that he was likely to approach the arbor at any time; it was Mary's private retreat. Nor did he know that she often went there; and certainly he had no reason to think of her at night except as being in her bed.

Nevertheless, Mary had taken every precaution of secrecy, and Mrs. Dobbs was entirely devoted to her; so the infatuated girl and her lover—her husband, as she believed him to be, and not without serious reason—had spent many happy hours in this pleasant retreat; though it must be said that on this night Ziletto had found Mary a good deal disturbed by reason of his marked attentions to Francesca.

"But, my love," he said, in his caressing manner, "you would not have me wanting in courtesy to my countrywoman?"

"No, Giovanni, nor to any one else, dear," Mary answered, her head resting upon his shoulder, his arms about her.

“And I knew her in our beautiful Venice; and they are but boors, as you call them, her husband’s comrades at the Old Hall, and Roubillac himself is a sour-faced, jealous, uncompanionable recluse.”

“And you took pity on her—that is what you would say, Giovanni; but, dearest, you must take pity upon no one but me. I am easily jealous, and I might hate as well as I love.”

“Hate!” exclaimed the Italian, and he put her from him to look inquiringly into her eyes, “it is not possible that there is any of the fiery passion of the South in your Northern veins. Ah, it makes me love you the more.” And yet he knew all the while that he meant to quit Eyam as soon as he had completed arrangements at that moment afoot, and without a word of farewell.

“Nay, then I am glad, Giovanni, if ’tis possible I could hate as well as love, since it pleases you; but I could never hate you, Giovanni, whatever might betide, nor could you give me cause, you whose heart is so tender, whose love is so generous; for what have you not given up for me—your own sunny skies and all the life and gayety and luxury that belong to your own beautiful home! And yet, dear, if you would only now let me confess to my father it might be that he would give his consent that I should accompany you thither, and he, too, might journey with us, who knows? for he is fond of travel.”

“But he is not fond of me, Mary,” said the Italian.

"Oh, but he would be if he knew that I had given you my heart and soul; ay, my heart and soul and body and everything I have to give, and my life if you ask it," said the Northern beauty, with all the passion of that passionate South Giovanni had told her of.

"Then it shall be so, dearest. We will confess; we will kneel at his feet, we will be the penitents," he said.

"My own dear husband!" answered the infatuated girl; and while he embraced her he was thinking of his tryst with Francesca for the next day, having succeeded in renewing his spell, as he thought, upon Francesca, who had, however, once again confessed her fears to Roubillac, and was at that moment praying for strength of resistance.

"It will give me, you know not how much happiness, Giovanni," said Mary, "to tell my father all. I find my eyes shrinking from his fond gaze. Sometimes I think he half suspects me. You know what it is to love a father? No. But a mother?"

"My mother died when I was born," he answered.

"And mine soon after. But for loving care and devotion I have had in her place my old nurse, who has been a mother to me—mother and friend and confidante—trusted, too, by my father; and you have reason to like her, dear, have you not?"

"She has been good to me," said Ziletto, "and I shall reward her."

"She is rewarded in my happiness," said Mary. "But when shall we tell my father? When shall I once more have the right to take his embrace without trembling?"

"Before the week is ended, Mary," he answered. "And now let us talk of that no more, *cara mia*, light of my life!"

Nor did they. Mary was not only content with his reply, but grateful for it; and Ziletto encouraged her loving embrace with fresh stories of Venice and Florence, where she would be a queen among queens of beauty.

Presently they were surprised by a gentle tap at the door, the signal agreed upon to denote Mrs. Dobbs, who was at once admitted.

"'Tis time you came into the house, my sweet," said the devoted old woman. "Your father is restless. I don't think he has been abed, for a little while ago there was a light in his chamber, and I heard him talking. 'Tis the anniversary of your mother's death. Supposing he took it into his head to come hither?"

"My dear Margaret! Has he ever done so before?" Mary asked.

"Not for many a long year; but it came to my mind, and I'm full of forebodings to-night. Moreover, 'tis best you came in. Oh, sir, be advised, and let her father, the good Sir George, be acquainted wi' your secret. 'Tis not good to nurse it; be assured 'tis not."

"My dear kind dame, he shall know of it ere the week is done. Does that content you?"

"Ay, sir, it do; and thank you kindly. Ah!

if you only knew what a great noble heart my master hath, you'd never fear to trust him."

"It shall be as you say, dear madame," said Ziletto; and Mary, in token of this concession, looked up into his face and courted an embrace.

"Hist! hist!" said Mrs. Dobbs. "Close the lattice. I heard a footstep on the gravel."

Mary closed the casement; and they stood still to listen.

"'Tis nothing," said the old woman, after a while. "Forgive me, I am full of fears to-night. I seem to be a girl again, with Sir George a-comin' and courtin' his wife that was, God rest her! My wits are wool-gathering."

"Let us say good-night, dear," said Mary to Ziletto. "Go you before, Margaret, to the house, while I take leave of my husband and lock the lower gate."

Mrs. Dobbs opened the door cautiously. All was still. The moon was riding high among banks of clouds, giving her light at fitful intervals.

The lovers sat for some little time talking in whispers sweet and low. At last they began to say good-night. Mary opened the door; then closed and locked it, replacing the key in her bosom. It was tied with a piece of ribbon, that carried the talisman of her love, a jeweled ring that Ziletto had placed upon her finger during the ceremony which was a cherished secret. On these nights of happy intercourse she had taken it from the ribbon and worn it; not the plain loop of homely Eyam, but the embossed ring of the

Italian artificer, set with jewels; the kind of ring, Ziletto told her, with which the fanciful marriage of the Doge of Venice and the Adriatic was confirmed, an annual ceremony that he promised her she should see ere long with her own eyes in her own state barge.

"How beautiful the night is!" she said, as she stood, with Ziletto's arms about her, at the gate, where they always paused a few minutes to kiss and say a last good-night.

"The clouds have withdrawn for a moment that the moon may behold you, cara mia," said Ziletto, as the lamp of night appeared for a moment in a blue rift of the darkness. "The moon looks down upon many happy lovers, but upon none so blessed as I—upon no lady so lovely as thou!"

"Nay, you are too fond, Giovanni. But you shall not make me vain—except of the love you bear me."

"S-s-sh! Did you hear nothing? A footstep?"

"No, dear," she answered, clinging to his arm. "Which way?"

"Behind us, on the meadow path, I think—coming from the garden."

"Margaret, perhaps," said Mary.

As Ziletto spoke, he drew Mary from the gate, which he closed, and hurried along the path, to reach shelter among the various recesses in the glen upon which the meadow abutted. But they had only proceeded a short distance when they were arrested by Clegg, with the demand, "Who goes there?"

Neither Ziletto nor Mary spoke.

"Nay, then, I guess who you be. Surely 'tis for no good you are here this time o' night. Is one of you named Ziletto?"

It was a false and fickle moon, after all; on the instant it shone out bright and clear, and Ziletto and Mary Talbot stood revealed.

"Forgive me, Miss Talbot, but for the moment I will consider that I stand in the place of your father. Command me!"

"How dare you speak to me in such words?" said Mary.

"Who commissioned you, sir, to play the spy?" began Ziletto angrily, but was interrupted by Mary, who clung to his arm.

"For heaven's sake, dearest, be calm. Let there be no quarrel!"

Then, turning to Clegg, she said, "This can be explained, Mr. Clegg. You do not understand—you—"

"By my soul!" said Clegg, "but I fear I understand too well."

Ziletto struggled to get free from Mary, and felt for his dagger.

"It can all be explained," said Mary; "though we deny your right to question us."

"And I assert it, as your father's friend, and as one who respects you, and is jealous of the honor of Eyam. You have an explanation. What is it? An elopement?"

"Curse you, sir!" exclaimed Ziletto. "Be-gone! You insult the lady."

"If there is an insult in the case, 'tis not I

who have offered it. Miss Talbot knows I am not the man to insult her father's daughter. At the same time I am the man to protect her father's honor, if need be. I venture to ask Miss Talbot to permit me to escort her home; and I advise her to explain with speed what this meeting here may mean, at a time of night when her father's house is closed and all his guests are abed; and, if she need any poor service of mine that shall help her therein, I am at her orders and disposal."

"You are a villain!" exclaimed Ziletto, suddenly freeing himself from Mary, his Italian blood all afire, discretion thrown to the winds.

A curse upon his lips, he rushed at Clegg, who, warily watching for such a contingency, caught him by his dagger arm and held him, while he addressed him.

"Be careful, you fool! You have compromised Sir George Talbot's daughter. Curse you, think of her and her reputation! Give me your knife, you mountebank!" With which appeal he closed to disarm him.

It was as if the moon took a malicious part in the business of this unhappy night.

At the moment of the encounter between Clegg and Ziletto, a gleam of moonlight fell for a second upon a cloaked figure that glided down the path from the direction of the arbor. Ziletto had not been wrong when he thought he heard footsteps in the direction of the garden.

Clegg had possessed himself of Ziletto's dagger as the shadowy figure was absorbed by the night. The moon left the entire group in dark-

ness but for the briefest space of time. As it shone out again Ziletto was about to renew the struggle with Clegg, though held back by Mary Talbot and discouraged by a warning word or two from the Englishman.

“For God’s sake, listen to me!” said Clegg. “I am Miss Talbot’s friend. I—”

Clegg’s last appeal to the manhood of his rival was stopped by a paralyzing intrusion. A hand seemed to reach out of the darkness and clutch the throat of Ziletto. He uttered an agonizing cry of alarm. Then a third person seemed suddenly to have joined them. A thudding blow fell upon the Italian; and then another, the very wind of which chilled Clegg’s flaming cheek. A muffled voice uttered some words in a strange tongue. They sounded like an imprecation. Thereupon Ziletto was flung to the earth all of a heap, and the third person, that might have been a materialized shadow for all either Mary or Clegg saw of it, disappeared into the darkness.



## CHAPTER TWENTY-NINE

“A HAND REACHED OUT OF THE DARKNESS”

AND there between them lay the body of Ziletto.

The moon shone out, in one of its fitful moments, and showed it to them. Mary Talbot flung herself down by it and moaned. Clegg stooped and felt at that part of the still anatomy where the heart should have beaten. There was

no pulse. He turned the body over, face upward. The eyes, glassy, stared stonily up into the night, and the moon went in again behind a bank of clouds. The Italian was dead. Clegg's hands were wet with his blood, though the victim of the vengeful dagger bled inwardly more than outwardly.

"You had better get up, Miss Talbot," he said.

She only moaned, in a pitiful way.

"The poor fellow is dead. Let me carry him away."

Mary stole her arms about Ziletto's neck, as if to protest against his removal.

"It is an awful business, but if there is a spark of life left it were best to carry him to the village," said Clegg.

At this, she started and looked at him. Not that he caught any more than a glimpse of her face, for the night was still black, except when the moon shone out at brief intervals, and at this moment it was almost hidden.

"You said he was dead," she answered, in a voice unbroken by emotion or sob, but in a tone of despair.

"I think he is," said Clegg, once more stooping to listen for any sign of life. "Yes, he will trouble the world no more; he is dead."

"It was a cruel thing to kill him," she said, almost in a matter-of-fact way. "I did not know you hated him so."

"I did not kill him. God forbid!" said Clegg.

"You said he was a villain! Oh, my God, what has happened? Where am I?"

She rose to her feet. The moon came out. She turned a face to Clegg that was paler than the moon's—a white, stricken face.

"Calm yourself, Miss Talbot," said Clegg. "I will carry him to the inn."

"He was my husband!" she exclaimed. "And you have killed him! Oh, great heaven, what had I done to be so punished? S-s-sh! I think I must be mad. Who are you?"

"Calm yourself," said Clegg again. "S-s-sh! Don't cry. Yes, weep; perhaps it will be good for you."

She had now burst into a passion of tears. Sob after sob shook her like a palsy, and with it she uttered wild ejaculations. She staggered, as if she would fall. Clegg caught her in his arms. He did not speak, but simply held her so that she should not fall, and her head drooped upon his breast. It seemed as if she had become insensible. She had ceased to sob, and a glint of moonlight now showed him her face all wet with tears, but in a deathly repose.

"My God! what shall I do?" he said to himself. "Carry her home? Yes."

She was no light burden even for a strong and powerful man such as Clegg; but what a loving burden, under other circumstances! Even now his heart thrilled as he lifted her into his arms and began to stride out into the footpath.

The moon shone full upon the way as he climbed the steps that led to My Lady's Bower. The gate was fastened. He fancied he saw a light between the chinks of the shutters.

Perhaps Margaret Dobbs was up and waiting for her mistress. The thought came to him instinctively. He leaned against the gate and kicked at it with his boot. No answer. He kicked again, and listened. No reply.

"I must go back and round by the road," he said to himself, "and through the forecourt. Dear heart, look up! I begin to fear she is dead!"

Then he kicked at the gate with a will, and cried out, "Open! For God's sake, open!"

Thereupon a voice answered, "Who be it?"

"Your mistress; she has fainted. For God's sake, open at once!"

Margaret Dobbs, the faithful nurse and confidante, unlocked the door.

"Oh, what be it?" she exclaimed. "What's the matter?"

"Your mistress is the matter. Have you water within?"

He forced himself past the old woman, toward the doorway of My Lady's Bower.

"Yes, yes," said the woman. "Lord help us! What is wrong?"

By this time he had entered the room and laid his burden down upon a wide couch, among a little world of cushions; and Margaret Dobbs approached her with a beaker of water.

"Lord in heaven, have mercy upon us! What is the matter?" she said, looking at Clegg, but all the time sprinkling the white face of her mistress with one hand, while she began to undo her bodice with the other.

"Don't ask me. Wet her lips, wet her lips; nay, give me the water."

Clegg took the beaker from the old woman, and dashed the contents into Mary's face. She did not move.

"Oh, my love, my sweet!" exclaimed Margaret Dobbs, pushing back the hair from the white face. Clegg, at the same moment, with what seemed to Margaret a rough indelicate hand, tore open the slackened bodice, breaking its laces and exposing the fair bosom. Then scooping up another supply of water from the great basin that was filled by a trickling fountain at the doorway, he dipped his handkerchief into it, and began to beat Mary's neck and face with the wet bandage.

If it had been necessary to her life that he should be cruel to her, he would have been cruel. Under the smart of the wet whip, the color presently came back to Mary's cheeks, and with a deep sigh her lips parted.

"Thank God!" Clegg exclaimed; "she lives!"

Considering the misery, to which this night was the bitter prologue, it might have been better had Mary Talbot died; but Heaven has its own mysterious and beneficent ways.

How beautiful she was, the village belle, as she gradually came back to life, her hair in golden brown masses about her face, her white bosom rivaling the models and the fancies of all the painters that ever strove to idealize the physical graces of God's masterpiece.

Clegg, with a trembling hand, placed the

beaker of water to her lips. She drank, and opened her eyes.

“Put her to bed!” said Clegg to the old woman; “put her to bed. If she thinks she has had a bad dream, let her dream on; but put her to bed; encourage her to sleep, give her some draught you may know of to help her. If she will speak, go on telling her that she only dreams. Good-night! God help us!”

Mrs. Dobbs had not noticed the blood upon Clegg’s hands. It was dry, and might well have been the shadow of the lamp upon them. He turned to take a farewell look at Mary Talbot, as she seemed about to speak, and left the place, retracing his steps through the gate, and, oddly enough, noting the perfume of the white syringa that clustered among the foliage by the arbor; it was deadly—reminded him of the scent in his father’s room, where he lay dead when Reuben was a mere lad.

The moon went in once more, and left him in comparative darkness. He listened. It might be that some one was stirring. Not a sound. Not a soul was abroad. Not a light could be seen in the distant village. Down the steps from the Bower, and into the stony footpath, and into the little sub-glen of the great defile of Stony Middleton, where he and his mother had watched that strange procession, and once more he was standing by the dead body of Giovanni Ziletto. Then he began to think; and presently, in a strong reflective mood, he sat down by the roadway, a short distance from the fatal spot.

She had said this man was her husband. He only remembered this among other things now, as if it was a distant memory of some long-distant time. Her husband! What did she mean? Did she mean her husband in the sight of God?

Or had they been secretly married? And who was it that had dealt the fatal blow? She said it was he, Reuben Clegg. At this he rose to his feet, with an exclamation. No, she could not have meant that! She did not know what she said. Nevertheless, who was the man? It must have been a man. The blows were struck with power. Of course it was no woman's hand. As for ghosts, well, there were no such things as ghosts, and spirits did not strike strong blows with a knife and kill a man! No supernatural agency would have invoked so physically powerful an ally. Clegg had talked to Mrs. Dobbs of dreaming; had begged her to encourage Mary Talbot in the belief that she had been dreaming. And now it seemed to him as if he might be still lying abed at home and seeing this tragedy in his sleep and the image of Mary with her white bosom and her wondering eyes, fresh-opened like the opaline light of the morning sky.

As his thoughts ran on in this direction, the day began to dawn. There was a faint line of dim light among the trees, high up on the rocky ridge above him. He watched it with a wondering gaze. Then there was a twitter of birds. At first he thought the light was the moon; but it was the first token that the sun was on its way up the Eastern sky. He sat and watched it.

Never once did his eyes seek the body that was lying close by. It was as if some pitiful trick of memory had interposed to give him rest for a space, that his energies might be braced for the trials he had to undergo. Presently, his head drooped against the white rock, and he slept.

It was only for a few minutes that he had become unconscious. He awoke with a start. The light in the trees above was broadening. A blackbird began to sing. It was a cheerful, soul-stirring note, with something of the gush and gurgle of the nightingale, but with none of its sadness. There must have been nightingales in that remote valley at some time, for the blackbird to have learned the trick of its note.

All at once it seemed as if the bird's song had brought Clegg back to the reality of the situation.

"No, great God!" he said to himself, starting to his feet, "it is no dream; it is an awful reality!"

There was the body, lying stiffly in the footpath. Up above, the morning was breaking. A thrush began to answer the challenge of the blackbird.

Clegg stooped to pick up the dead Italian. The body was stiffening, but the arms were still limp. Clegg had heard of the difficulties of carrying a dead body. Men who had fought in the wars loved to talk of the grim side of battles. First, he lifted the body in his arms. It was impossible to carry it in that position. Mary Talbot had been a much lighter load. She was

limp, and his love for her had made the burden a featherweight. But this Italian, whom he had hated, was no mean weight; so he laid the body down again, and tried other ways of carrying it. At last his grim efforts were successful. He hauled the body over his shoulders, and set out for the village.

It was daylight when he entered the long street; and strange to say, Dakin, the constable, met him. Dakin had a tooth for mushrooms. He had risen early to gather that dainty fungus, which his wife cooked to perfection.

"Holy Mother! as them pertinacious Papists have it, what's this!" he exclaimed. "Reuben Clegg! And the Italian. And one of them dead, by all the saints! There'll be no mushrooms for breakfast this morning, Mrs. Dakin! The Lord save us! Clegg's killed him!"

He stood in the middle of the road, as if to intercept the man with the body over his shoulders. Clegg saw him.

"Out of the way," said Clegg, gasping with the pressure of his load.

"Out o' the way," repeated the constable. "I think not."

"Then lend a hand," said Clegg, "for I'm about done!" And he laid the body on a bank by the road, close to the Everwater, with its flaunting decorations.

"Who's done this?" said the constable.

"Go you to the Crown and Anchor and get them up, if they be not up already," said Clegg, "and let them prepare his room to receive him."

"Na, my lad, I'll not lose sight o' yo', or the mortal body o' the stranger, Giovanni Ziletto."

He rolled the Christian name and surname of the Italian upon his Northern tongue, as if he was already giving evidence of the crime and his discovery thereof before the chief magistrate of the district.

"Then lay hold on him, and help me to the inn," said Clegg.

"I'll do nowt o' the sort," said the constable; "but it will be my duty to lay hold on yo' for an account o' the manner in which this Giovanni Ziletto came by his death."

"By —— you'll never lay hold on another if you lay a hand on me," said Reuben. "And now lay hold on the body; d'ye hear, lay hold."

Thus menaced, the constable, setting down the basket that he had intended to fill with mushrooms, humbly laid hold of the dead man's legs, Reuben lifting his head and shoulders; and so they carried their awful load to the Crown and Anchor. Radford was just opening the door.

"Why, in the devil's name, what's this!" he exclaimed.

"Lead the way to the man's room," said Clegg.

Radford did so, at the same time calling, "Missus! Here! Wakken, everybody! Wakken! There's murder been done; murder!"

Radford was quite beside himself at sight of the dead body of Ziletto, and the house was soon alive with servants and guests; for, like every

other place in the village, the inn was filled with visitors, who slept anywhere, and most of whom had gone to bed late, carrying thither enough liquor to give them dreams almost as grewsome as the reality of Clegg's experiences.

When the body had been comfortably laid upon the bed, and Mrs. Radford had begun to discuss the question of laying it out, the constable demanded that it should not be disturbed, until the coroner and his jury had seen it; but in the meantime he called upon Reuben Clegg to give himself up to his custody. They were in the great house-place of the inn when the constable addressed Reuben, in presence of the company there assembled; all of them greatly excited, some in a dazed state of headache, some rubbing their eyes, the women all alert and full of inquiry.

"I am going home," said Reuben. "I will meet you, Mr. Constable, before the coroner, or where you will, within the hour, if it so please you: but until then I am for home. My mother will be alarmed at my long absence."

"Nay, my lad, yo're none going home. I make yo' my prisoner. I shanna' wait for the coroner, by the token that he's away on a journey; I shall take thee before Sir George Talbot, soon as he's out o' bed, and charge thee!"

"Charge me!" said Clegg. "With what?"

"The murder o' Giovanni Ziletto. Thou wert the last man, I reckon, seen in his company, and I met thee carrying his body."

"And does that imply that I murdered him?"

"It implies that thou'st gotten to account for his death."

"Aye, aye!" said several voices.

"I will account for it, as far as I know, to the magistrate," said Reuben; "but as he's still abed, I'll go home, until 'tis fitting he be wakened to receive me."

"Nay, thou'lt none go home," said the constable, only too ready, like a weak creature, to pay off his little grudges against Clegg, and bold to make arrest of him while men stood by upon whom he could call for assistance if need be.

"I did not kill the man; I was by when he fell; and all this and the rest I will relate to Sir George Talbot in due time. But now I am going home."

"Reuben Clegg, I arrest you in the name of the law!" said the constable, advancing upon him.

"You lie!" said Clegg. "You do nowt of the sort;" and he swept the constable aside, so that Dakin staggered into the arms of Radford, while Reuben Clegg strode out into the village street without further check or hinderance.

"Stop him! I charge you, every one, stop him!" gasped the constable.

Now, although Reuben was not what might be called popular in the village, by reason of his masterful ways and his greater knowledge of things than the best of them in the Hundred, the people respected him; and at this moment they admired the courage of the man, his willfulness, his power. Not a soul moved to stay him. Sev-

eral, indeed, laughed at the constable. The village carpenter said, at the top of his voice, "Well done, Master Clegg; I'n stand by yo' if yo' want any man's help."

"Stop him, I say, in the name of the law; he is my prisoner!" exclaimed the constable, gathering himself together and making for the door.

"Nay, it isna' our business," said Radford; "and, besides, we know him. He'll none run away; he'll keep his word; he'll none be missing when yo' want him."

"Oh, that's how yo' take it!" said the constable, freeing himself from the friendly arms that had broken his fall. "We'll see about it. As for yo', John Radford, yo'r license shall be revoked; we'll see about it!"

"See about it and be hanged!" said Radford, roused by the pompous attitude of the constable.

"Oh, I may be hanged, may I?" said Dakin, purple with rage, as he turned to leave the house.

"That's what I said, and I don't go agen my word. Revoke my license, yo' meddlin' fool? My father and his fathers before him have held the Crown and Anchor before your mushroom crew ever entered the High Peak Hundred. Talk to me of my license! I'll break my staff about your wooden skull, yo' penny jack-a-dandy."

"What is it, John?" exclaimed a feminine voice, as Mrs. Radford appeared on the scene, pushing her way through such of the servants and guests as were not peeping in at the chamber of death above.

"What is it? It's Dakin, the cowardly cur-mudgeon; talks to me as if I were nowt in Eyam, as if I hadna' served the king; as if we lived by his leave and 'lowance. By my soul, I'll pound his carcass to a jelly if he were twenty times constable an' he talks to me like that agen!"

"Here, father, have a mug of ale," said Jenny Radford, coming to the rescue of her mother. "Don't give such folk a thought."

Radford took the mug, emptied it, gave a great sigh, and, looking round, said, "Jenny knows how to get over her fayther. Jenny, my lass, draw for our friends."

Jenny disappeared.

"And now, lads and lasses, come, bustle! Donnat stand gaping; get to work. It mun be a'most breakfast time." Then, seeing Jenny, with a mug of ale and a cluster of horn cups, he said, "I'm hot i' the temper, bein' roused; but it's soon ovver. Try the Crown and Anchor's tap, my friends; and you'll find plenty to do to tell everybody what's happened by time breakfast's ready."

Jenny handed round the ale. Radford went to the door.

"By gum! Village's all astir. They'n gotten summat to talk about now, besides Well-dressing."

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## CHAPTER THIRTY

## MOTHER AND SON

THE sun and a quaint old lamp were illuminating Clegg's cottage as he climbed the path that led to the garden gate. His mother had put the light in the window for a beacon. Not that she had ever done so before. It struck Reuben, however, in this way. He remembered that his mother had not wished him to go out again after he had taken her home. She had a restless foreboding of ill, she said. Superstitious himself about some things, and indeed with his divining-rod the embodiment of a certain gift that appeared to many more than human, Reuben was skeptical of other people's omens. He put down his mother's to over-solicitude for him, arising out of her undue affection.

"You're too fond, mother," he had answered her. "I will be back by time you've said your prayers."

But the loving mother had said her usual prayer, and many another, before Reuben returned. When she heard his footsteps upon the limestone flags that paved the footway along the garden, she knew that "something" had happened, whatever the something might be that she had feared. A woman's instinct is delicate as it is strong; it has strange mental feelers that reach far; some one has likened them to the an-

tennæ of the butterfly; but the love of a mother is gifted with a second sight; it has eyes that look into the future.

"What has happened, Reuben?" she asked, meeting him in the doorway.

Her face was gray as her hair. She looked up at him with keen eyes. He took her into his great arms, and pressed her convulsively to his heart. Then he led her to his own chair, and took her upon his knee. He spoke no word; nor, for the time, did she ask another question. She knew that he had suffered some serious hurt in his heart; for his body, she felt, lacked none of its strength. What she had feared when she asked him not to go out again she knew not; now she felt a little flutter of gladness that he was at home, whole and strong; and yet she knew that he was suffering.

"Mother," he said, presently, placing her in her chair, and himself standing by the door and looking out at the risen sun, "I wish I had listened to thee and stayed at home."

Then he turned and saw the dull blinking of the lamp in the sunshine; and he strode to the old sideboard and put out the light.

"Did'st thou put it i' the window for me?"

"Ay," she said. "Seemed to me it might remind thee to come."

"I wish I'd seen it," he said.

When he talked to his mother it was in the local vernacular, the peculiarities of which it is not necessary to do more than suggest in these pages.

“What’s happ’d, Reuben?”

“Nay, something awful, mother. It’s a cruel thing to drive th’ sleep from thy gradely eyes wi’ such a tale as I’ve gotten to tell. Sit thee down, mother, and howd my hand; and I’ll tell thee.”

He sat down by her side, and she laid her hand in his.

“I was thinkin’ about what had gone on during th’ day, about the Italians, and th’ Well-dressings that had taken place before they come to Eyam, and Mary Talbot come into my mind, and yonder Ziletto, the fiddlin’ and singin’ chap, when, somehow, late in the night I found myself near by the meadow that leads to Talbot’s gardens and My Lady’s Bower; and lo and behold, who should come forth but the Italian and Talbot’s daughter, Mary.”

“Lord! Lord!” said Mrs. Clegg.

“It was a wavering kind of moon, fitful-like, but it shone out upon them; and, by heaven, you might have smitten me dazed with my thinnest willow-sprig!”

“Alas! alas!” said Mrs. Clegg.

“I challenged them. Miss Talbot rebuked me, with scorn. The Italian cur asked who had commissioned me to play the spy. Then, it was as if we both made for each other; not before other words passed, which I needna’ repeat. We came to blows, or would have done, but in the thick of it a hand reached out of the darkness and stabbed him to death!”

“A hand reached out of the darkness,” said Mrs. Clegg, “and stabbed him to death?”

“Yes; that is the long and short of it. I’ve not told you all that was said; but that’s what it come to. He drew his knife on me; it was going to be a fight; then, all of a sudden, it seemed as if a third party had joined us; but I only saw a strange hand for a moment, and all was over; the Italian fell dead between me and Mary Talbot.”

“Lord have mercy on us!” said Mrs. Clegg. “It was not for nowt that my heart was sad all day, my prayers welling up in tears. Oh, my son! My dear Reuben.”

“Mother, don’t take on too much about it. Be brave. There’s no blame to me—except that I did not love thee enough to listen to thee, when thou saidst ‘Reuben, donnat go out again to-night!’ ”

“Donnat fear that I’ll not be brave, Reuben.”

“I mun tell thee all! Mary Talbot fell into a faint. I carried her to th’ Lady’s Bower; old Mother Dobbs was there, waiting for her. And I forgot to tell thee, Miss Talbot said the dead man was her husband.”

“Her husband!” said Mrs. Clegg. “Her husband! And what dost thou think o’ that?”

“Nay, mother, I donnat know what to think. When I’d seen her safe home I carried th’ body to th’ Crown and Anchor!”

“Nay, did’st thou? Well, it was th’ right thing, I make no doubt; it’s more than I could ha’ done if I’d been strong enough. He was a cursed thing in thy path, yonder Italian; a

snake, a serpent, an unholy life. Maybe 'tis the Lord has struck him down!"

The old woman drew herself up as she spoke and her eyes flashed angrily. She had no expression of sorrow for the murdered man. She hated him. He had come between Reuben and his love; between her and her dearest ambition; it must have been God who had removed him.

"I donnat think it was a Divine hand that interposed in our contest," said Reuben; "nor does old Dakin, the constable."

"What does that dunderhead think?" asked Mrs. Clegg.

"I donnat know what he thinks; I only know what he says."

"And what does he say, Reuben? What does he say?"

"That I am his prisoner, mother. Nay, I'd have thee face the thing straight; for when I think of it, I've known men get into trouble with far less cause of suspicion against them."

"What dost thou mean, Reuben? Nay, tell me, lad; keep nothing back, even if thou killed him thysen!"

"Mother, what art thou saying? Seems to me you've unknowingly struck me in the very spot where the constable wounded me."

"Wounded thee!"

"Not bodily, but mentally—spiritually. Nay, but you have alarmed me, mother!"

"Reuben, my love, my own, donnat say that! What is it I have said?"

"Thou saidst, 'even if I had killed him myself.'"

"I only meant that I could bear the very worst, and that 'twas best to tell me all and have no fear."

"The constable said I was last in company of th' dead man and must account for his death; as good as hinted that I should be charged with his murder; and even laid his hand upon me, and said I was his prisoner."

"And thou?"

"I said he lied, and came home to thee, mother."

"And thou didst right, Reuben. Come and wash thyself, and go to bed, lad, and rest. Eyam will take thy word; the whole High Peak Hundred will; and thou art Sir George Talbot's partner."

"I tow'd them I should be found when I was wanted; and it's my intention, soon as Sir George is up, to go and let him know all that passed—though it troubles me sore to know what I shall say about his daughter."

"Say, Reuben? Why, the truth; the whole truth, and nowt else. And now come, lad, to thy room, and wash thee and put on a change—when thou gets up, after a rest."

She had noted the blood upon his hands and the stains upon his jerkin. When he had washed, she poured the water away; and when he was asleep, she tried to take the stains out of his jerkin. Failing this, she buried it in the garden, and laid another ready to his hand when he should awaken.

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## CHAPTER THIRTY-ONE

## HOW THE MORNING CAME TO MARY TALBOT

"WHERE do you think she be, you meddlin' good-for-nowt?" replied Margaret Dobbs to Dakin's inquiry after Miss Talbot.

"In bed, I shouldn't wonder; but not at her Aunt Deborah's."

"Well, who said she was?" the testy old woman answered.

"They do say that lights ha' been seen i' My Lady's Bower, off and on, o' nights this week or two; and late, mark you."

"Pity there's no light i' thy head, Dakin," said Margaret; "it 'ud be all the better for a ha'p'orth o' sense."

"You wouldna' be so spiteful if yo' hadna' summat to keep i' the dark. But it makes no matter, I'n gotten to do my duty; you seem to be th' only body that's up, and I'll thank yo' to tell Sir George Talbot that th' constable 'ud like to see him."

"Consarnin' what, may I ask?"

"A murder, Mrs. Dobbs."

"Oh!"

"Maybe yo'n heard of it?"

"I canna' say that I hev; what's it all about?"

"I'm afear'd it's about your young mistress—God save her!"

"About my young mistress. What do you mean?"

"Jealousy, I should say."

"Oh!"

"Th' man was killed close by th' Lady's Bower."

"What man?"

"Ziletto, th' Italian."

"Oh!"

"I don't want to do no hurt to Miss Talbot; if she was at her Aunt Deborah's, it mightna' be a bad thing for her; there's all sorts o' things said; the wonder to me is who finds things out; I'd no idea that Ziletto was courtin' Miss Talbot, not th' least, though ivverybody was well aware that Mester Clegg affected th' young lady."

"Affected! What do you mean?"

"I mean was drawn to her, and had got her in his thoughts—a stuck-up, proud, owd know-all!"

"You donnat like Mester Clegg."

"And nobody else does that I knows on; he's got such a way o' bestin' folks wi' his books and his opinions and th' like; but I'm thinkin' he's done for hissen this time. However, none of us but would do Miss Talbot a good turn; none of us that doesna' worship her father, some of us more than we worships at Church; so I'd like you to tell Miss Talbot what's goin' on."

"You're a good deal of a fool, Humphrey Dakin, but yo'n not gotten such a bad heart. It's an awful bad business, this!"

"Ay, 'tis," said the constable.

"I'll tell th' young mistress what you say."

"They mek out i' th' village that she was there at th' time; how they mek it out I canna' tell,

except that there was a bunch o' ribbins and a brooch found on th' spot by that ovver-pert daughter o' Radford's—th' one wi' reddish hair, Jane, they ca' her; seems while th' body was be-in' put to bed and the like some o' th' folk started off to see where th' deed was done, and they followed traces o' blood to th' bit o' glen off Middleton Dale and close by steps leadin' from gate as goes to My Lady's Bower, and there they found ribbins and brooch, which Jane Radford swears belongs to Miss Talbot. She's a minx, that Jane Radford; was ovver fond o' th' Italian hersen', they do say; but what wi' one thing and another I havena' had time to go to th' spot, and I reckon it was my duty, but I was so stalled wi' Clegg defyin' my authority, and, furthermore, I says to mysen', I'd better speak wi' Mrs. Dobbs if I can, and give her chance to let Miss Talbot be warned that I'm goin' to ask Sir George for a warrant to arrest Reuben Clegg."

"Very well," said Mrs. Dobbs, who had been doing her best to repress all signs of anxiety or emotion. "I think Sir George be stirring by this; servants is gettin' up, I can hear them, so I'll just oppen lib'ry shutters and you can wait for Sir George—and thank yo' for what yo'n tow'd me."

She led the way to the library, where Dakin, taking upon his knee the great calf-bound law book that Sir George often consulted, proceeded to fumble over the section that was devoted to criminal procedure.

Mrs. Dobbs went back to Mary's room. The girl was wide awake.

"Well, Margaret," she said, "what have you heard?"

Mrs. Dobbs told her what had passed between her and the constable.

"I think I will go to my father before he sees Dakin."

"I'm too dazed to give you advice, my love," said the old woman, the tears starting into her eyes; "better let thy heart speak."

"Yes, Dobbs, yes," said the girl, rising from her bed, half-dressed. "I will go to him."

"My dear unhappy one, God be with you. I think it's best."

"Go, then, dear Dobbs, and tell my father that before he sees the constable I wish to speak with him."

Then, laying aside the gown she had worn, and stripping off the petticoat in which she had lain down, she began to make a careful toilet. She was very pale, and there were dark rims about her eyes.

"What did he say?"

" 'Tell her to come to my room, Dobbs,' he said. 'I'll see her before I go down, and my love to her. Some business of the Wells, eh?' "

"And how did you reply?"

"Nay, I said nowt; I nigh choked wi' grief, he was that cheerful; looked so well, and was so sprightly."

"Yes, dear, it is very sad," said Mary, with a strange calmness.

"I'm glad you're dressin' up a bit," said the

old woman. "I was afeared you might be goin' to him just as you was. Nowt like straightenin' up, it steadies one. I've always felt that i' time o' trouble and death a good wash and puttin' one's things straight and the like—eh, but, my sweetheart, you look the image of your mother. Sir George canna' be angry with thee, lass, he canna'. He loved yonder mother o' thine beyond all imagining, I can tell you, and half his love for thee, my dear, comes from you being your mother's child. God rest her!"

"You said they carried him to his own room at the Crown and Anchor?" said Mary, busy with her own thoughts and making a supreme effort to realize the promise she had made to herself in her prayers, to bear her burden with patience.

"Yes, my love, yes."

"Who were they?"

"It was the constable that met him, but not till he was nearly there."

"You mean Reuben Clegg?"

"Yes."

"He carried me home?"

"Yes."

"And then my dead husband! Oh, to think of it! And all this misery in one short night, with the moon shining and the sun rising as if nothing had happened. Oh, Margaret, is it all true?"

"Alas, every word of it!"

"Have I been asleep?"

"No; but thou hast not been thyself."

"He sleeps, Margaret, but oh, how sudden! Dost think it might be a trance?"

"I've made thee a posset that might incline thee to sleep a while; wilt take it? You can go to your father after he's had his breakfast."

"Ay," she said, with a child-like smile, and sipped her old nurse's decoction; but it would have needed a much more powerful narcotic than any Dobbs dared prepare to close Mary's eyes to the scenes that haunted her, and would haunt her for many a month to come, sleeping or waking.

"I must go and see my husband," she said; "a sad sight, Margaret, a sad sight! We will gather all the whitest and sweetest-smelling flowers we have, to lay by his side. He loved flowers and music, and everything that was beautiful."

"He loved thee," said the old woman, as if in confirmation of the girl's eulogium of his taste.

"And for me, Dobbs dear, weeds, weeds, for evermore: rue, hemlock, the deadly nightshade, poppies, all the saddest things!"

She brushed her hair and tied it in a knot at the back of her head, drew round her shoulders a scarf or sash, and contemplated herself in her mirror.

"Poor Mary!" said Dobbs. "I pity thee from my heart; married and widowed so soon, and so secretly—no wedding-bells, no passing-bell, and I've been listening for it all the morning. Won't they let him have a passing-bell, poor Giovanni?—S-s-sh, there it is!"

And, sure enough, as she spoke the passing-bell was tolling for the dead Ziletto.

"And now I will go to my father," said the girl, kissing her woman tenderly, her face pale as death, her eyes expressionless.

"Ah, my poor child!" said the woman.

"I hope it won't break his heart," the girl replied. "Mine is dead with Ziletto. How long may one live without a heart?"

"Nay, thou art young, lovey; thy heart will mend. Time is a wonderful mender of broken hearts."

And so she went forth to tell her story to her father. Margaret Dobbs followed her through the doorway, and heard the loud and hearty greeting Sir George gave his daughter; and then she stole away, awestruck.

"God save them both!" she prayed, "and grant she may not lose her wits!"



## CHAPTER THIRTY-TWO

"SUMMON THE JURY, CALL FORTH YOUR WITNESSES"

HUMPHREY DAKIN, as we have seen, was not a man of any remarkable sensibility, but he was shocked when Sir George Talbot entered the library. On the previous day a hale, ruddy, alert, cheerful gentleman, apparently as young at heart as the striplings who greeted him at the Wells and cast furtive glances at his beautiful daughter;

and now an old man, his eyes red with care, his body bent, the figure of one whose hair might have turned white in a night, a wreck of his former self.

"Your pardon, Sir George, you are sick?" said the constable, stepping forward and offering the magistrate the assistance of his arm, which Sir George politely declined.

"Not sick unto death, Dakin; but sick, as thou sayest. My daughter has told me all."

"I will not pain your graciousness by asking what 'tis you mean when you say all; though 'tis not much I know myself, yet 'tis too much."

"It shall be set forth in evidence, Dakin: the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth."

"If it doth in anywise compromise Miss Talbot, Sir George, let us take counsel, Sir George. I be but the humble constable; thou art the fountain of justice, representing the king, as 'twere."

"We must do our duty, wherever it lead us, Dakin," said Sir George, speaking with a judicial calmness that chilled the constable.

"I'd rather my tongue was blistered with a stroke than say a word against Miss Talbot, or your honor; nor hath it come within my province, for all I did but guess was that there might ha' been some jealousy between the two men, and it's as sure as death that Clegg had a mortal hatred of the Italian; and, begging your honor's pardon for trespassing on you, it was his high-and-mighty-ness with me and my office that impulsed me to arrest him."

“And is he under arrest?”

“Not *de facto*, but in law, may it please your honor; for I did charge him, and he would not surrender, but threatened me that to lay a hand on him would be to be incapacitated from laying a hand on any other as long as I should live; which in itself, Sir George, was nothing short of an assault and battery, and a resistance—”

“Be calm, Master Constable, and patient, and keep thy voice under control.”

“An it please you, and I crave your pardon for a loud-spoken knave that I am, little dreaming that your honor has taken on twenty years of age and infirmity since yesterday; pardon me for saying so, but there’s not a man in Eyam, or all the Hundred, that does not love your honor; but as for Clegg, he is a pestiferous knave, and—”

“It ill becomes thee to say so. What charge dost bring against him?”

“I charge him, that he, being last in company of Giovanni Ziletto, and seen in *flagranti delicto*—”

“Keep to thy English, Dakin.”

“An it please you, so I will. Taken red-handed, as I may say, the body in his possession, known to be at feud with him, and otherwise of a malicious tendency toward him, he is guilty of his murder, and so I charge him!”

“In the which, Dakin, I fear thou art guilty of importing prejudice into the exercise of thy office; for ’tis well known that there is a quarrel between thee and Clegg, and that thou hast threatened him with the payment of old scores

in thy capacity of constable—a thing that is most reprehensible, Dakin.”

“You are the fountain of justice here in Eyam. I might say the well undefiled—”

“Abridge thy metaphors, Dakin.”

“An it so please you, Sir George, I—”

“Surely thy duty was plain. A body being discovered under suspicious circumstances, or come of a violent death, without implicating any one in an act of carelessness or revenge or otherwise, thy duty was to notify the coroner and summon a jury—”

“Your honor knows the coroner is absent, and it seemed to me there was evidence against Clegg sufficient to have him brought before your honor in your magisterial capacity, and the only magistrate or knight of the shire, the coroner being away, privileged to take evidence on oath in this investigation.”

“But there is the coroner’s deputy.”

“Nay; I have received no intimation of the deputy.”

“I am he,” said Sir George; “I undertook the office for my absent friend.”

“All the same,” said Dakin, “it would appear to my best reasoning of the matter that I should have a warrant of arrest, and bring Reuben Clegg before your honor forthwith.”

“That may not be, Master Constable. Go thou and summon the jury for the crowner’s quest, and let the court be held at the Crown and Anchor.”

“If so please you, Sir George.”

“And summon what witnesses thou mayest deem necessary; and among them Reuben Clegg and Father Castelli at the Old Hall; and I will bring my daughter to the court.”

“There is neither man, nor woman, nor child in Eyam or the Hundred that—”

“Nay; I know what thou wouldst say. Get thee gone, Dakin; summon the jury, call thy witnesses, and I will open the inquest at noon.”



## CHAPTER THIRTY-THREE

“ONE THAT LOVED NOT WISELY, BUT TOO WELL”

AND the decorated Wells were deserted, the Village Green was empty. There was no more feasting. The people were all in the long street, or gathered together around the Crown and Anchor. Symbols of mourning had already taken the place of gay attire, and the royal standard fluttering from the church tower was half-mast high. The visitors who had come to hear the Word of God given joyfully and the bands play cheerful music, and those who also had looked forward more particularly to the dancing on the Green and the merry-making to follow the high festival of Ascension, found themselves taking part as spectators, some as witnesses, in the tragedy of Ziletto.

The sun made no recognition of the shadow that had fallen upon the village. It went on glorifying the florally-dressed Wells as if noth-

ing had happened to mar the occasion. But it awoke no response of indifference in the hearts of the people. Even the stranger within the gates shared in the general gloom, since it involved the chief inhabitants of the village, Sir George Talbot and his daughter, and sullied the reputation, as it was thought, of Reuben Clegg, whose name was famous not alone in Eyam, but in distant parts of the Hundred, as a man of curious knowledge and a master of divination as it applied to water and minerals.

Furthermore, the young Italian who lay dead in the Crown and Anchor's best room had given to Eyam one of its finest designs in the Well-dressing, and had been noted by many for his remarkable and fine appearance.

The calm happiness of the previous morning, the religious mood of the crowd listening to the Reverend George Mompesson's inspired words, both at the Wells and in the Church, and the joyousness of the night with its dance and song, made the gloom of this next day all the more impressive.

Mr. Constable Dakin had brought his jurymen together. Sir George Talbot, in his capacity of deputy-coroner, had formally opened the inquest in the general room of the Crown and Anchor. No lawyer watched the case for any of the parties concerned. Witnesses and spectators, seated and standing, filled the room. The windows were open upon what might be called the forecourt of the inn—the space in which it stood back from the road. Those who could not squeeze into the

room assembled about the windows and door of the inn, or occupied the passageways and thronged the garden at the back, beneath the window whence Ziletto had been in the habit of letting himself out on his visits to My Lady's Bower.

The jurymen sat around a long table, at the head of which Sir George had been provided with his own chair, brought down from the Manor House library by the constable, who stood near at hand. Sir George's clerk, who acted for him in magisterial cases, sat on his left hand. On his right was his daughter Mary. Sir George's right hand was laid affectionately upon her left, and every heart was touched at the sadness of the picture. They all noticed the worn look in Sir George's face, the wrinkles that seemed to have come in a night, the humble bend of the head, so marked now in one of his pride and authority.

Mary Talbot, her hat hung by a ribbon upon the arm of her father's chair, her hair partly bound to her head and partly falling in a heavy tress of golden brown, her white neck half-concealed by a silken scarf, her face almost more beautiful for its pallor that gave refinement of color to its youthfulness, might have been sitting in an empty room for all the consciousness she betrayed of the general presence of the village.

Reuben Clegg and his mother had been provided with seats near the further end of the table. Mrs. Clegg, in her Quaker-like gown and hood of gray, looked upon the assembly with a firm sense of her son's innocence and safety.

She glanced at him now and then, and from him to the crowd, as if in dumb appeal to her neighbors to say whether any man so favored by Nature, so upright and fearless of countenance, could be guilty of the meanness of stabbing a man in the dark; for it was generally known that the constable had openly charged him with the murder of the Italian. Clegg looked on with an air of unconcern, except when his eyes strayed toward Mary Talbot, and then, those who watched him could not fail to observe that he was deeply moved, and only with much effort could repress his emotion.

Great curiosity was excited by the presence of the Papist priest, Father Castelli, the Signor Roubillac, and other Italians from the Old Hall, sitting in close proximity with the Reverend George Mompesson and Mrs. Mompesson, the inhibited clergyman, Mr. Stanley, and the Signorina Francesca Roubillac, who had overruled her husband's desire that she should not be present. She came in a gown and hood of rich purple, her face half concealed at first, but during the inquiry wholly uncovered. Rarely did her dark eyes wonder from the face of the woman whom Ziletto had endeavored to make her look upon as a rival.

The preliminary formalities of the quest having been fully observed, Sir George presently opened the proceedings with a few remarks of deep pain and regret that the Festival of the Wells should have so melancholy an ending as that which had brought them together, neigh-

bors, friends and guests, to inquire into the death of Giovanni Ziletto, who, from coming among them an entire stranger, had won the respect of the village and the Hundred, and had so ingratiated himself with the young lady by his side as to win her for his wife, her love for him over coming her duty to her father, by a private marriage in an alien Church; which had ended, as most trespasses on parental authority ended, in sadness and sorrow. He said he had thought it wise to mention these matters at the outset, in order that this inquiry might be free and open and without restraint; their one object being to discover, if possible, the truth in respect of the death of the deceased, whose mortal remains they had viewed, and who had come to an untimely and violent end. Mary Talbot, whom they all knew and, he believed, respected, had come there voluntarily, of her own accord, to give her evidence; and although, in the ordinary course, he would think it his duty to warn her, and also Reuben Clegg, that, as being present at the time of the death of the deceased, they should remember that grave responsibility rested upon those last seen or heard of in the company of one about whose violent taking-off there was a question, he had resolved to let this inquiry, as the law intended in such cases, be enlarged to its fullest extent, informal as to the discipline of evidence in a criminal trial, and therefore permitting every witness, summoned or otherwise, to remain and take part in the investigation, which was to discover how and by what means Giovanni Ziletto came by his death.

At the same time, it should be remembered, as the constable had desired to impress upon him, that, in case the jury should find that in their unanimous opinion the guilt of the man's death should lie at the door of any known person or persons, they had the power to commit the said person or persons to take their trials for the same at the Assizes next ensuing, with or without further investigation before the magistracy.

Sir George's words fell on eager ears, and his references to his daughter brought the tears to many eyes. Francesca Roubillac little understood their purport, but she wept with the rest; and it was with consternation that the villagers listened to the Deputy-Coroner's closing words, that were briefly repeated by those nearest the window to those without, and went buzzing through the crowded street. Father Castelli whispered to Roubillac at the reference to Mary Talbot's secret marriage, a piece of information that came as a startling surprise to everybody. Something like a smile of satisfaction for a moment illuminated the ascetic face of Mrs. Mompesson, who, in an interview with Mrs. Dobbs at the Manor House, had heard somewhat vaguely of the relationship between Mary and Ziletto, Mr. Mompesson having brought her information of lights having been seen at late hours beneath the shutters of My Lady's Bower. Mrs. Mompesson found her faith in Mary at least partially indorsed by this reference to a secret marriage. Roubillac spoke occasionally to his wife, who turned to him now and then to ask a question;

always, however, with reference to Mary, whom she observed throughout with an air of solicitude and affection. Roubillac was, perhaps, the most self-possessed person in the room. He moved without the smallest appearance of restraint, spoke unaffectedly to his wife, watched the proceedings with deep interest, but with the affected interest of a mere looker-on.

The constable was the first witness called. He told the jury how he met Clegg carrying the dead body of Ziletto, and the manner in which Clegg had treated him; how he had assisted to carry the body into the Crown and Anchor, with the aid of Radford. Vicars, who had been elected foreman of the jury, asked the constable if he had knowledge of any quarrel between the deceased and Reuben Clegg; and the constable proceeded to relate various circumstances that had come under his notice, tending to show that there was animosity toward Ziletto on the part of Clegg.

"Sir George," said Reuben Clegg, slowly rising to his feet, "I would like to say a word; it will save time, and perhaps some lying to boot."

"I would advise that there should be no interruption of the ordinary course of evidence, Master Clegg," Sir George replied. "Your opportunity will come in due course."

"Very well," said Clegg, sitting down again by his mother, who laid her arm upon his as he resumed his seat.

The incident started a hum of conversation for a moment, and the news that Clegg had called the constable a liar went forth to the outer crowd,

and was elaborated, as it sped, into something like a quarrel in the court. During the afternoon the village that was outside the Crown and Anchor obtained still more curiously perverted accounts of the investigation; the close of which, however, came upon them with all the force of a calamity.

Other witnesses having been examined in connection with the discovery of the body of Ziletto, the undoubted cause of death, the finding of a brooch and bunch of ribbons by Jane Radford at the scene of the murder, Sir George Talbot, the deputy coroner, rose, and once more stating that his daughter came there of her own desire, took the Testament from his clerk, and tendered to her the oath himself, while every heart in the assembly almost stood still—that she, Mary Talbot, “would speak the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, touching the death of Giovanni Ziletto, so help her God!”

She had risen, and faced her father as he spoke. Taking the book into her hands, she bent her head over the sacred volume and kissed it.

“Tell the jury and the court what you know of the man, Giovanni Ziletto, and, so far as your knowledge goes, how he came by his death,” said Sir George, in a voice that lacked the firm judicial tones he desired and the judicial calm he hoped to assume.

Mompesson, who knew him well, could detect the suppressed emotion of the agonized father struggling between love and duty, and letting

duty, according to his severe lights, get the better of him.

Mary Talbot told the story as we know it. She spoke as if her evidence related to the experiences of some dear and suffering friend, pitying herself with, now and then, the tribute of tears. When she related how she had consented to a secret marriage, it was plain to the simplest that she was careful to take all the blame upon herself, and no one could for a moment doubt the truth of her account of the ceremony in the little chapel of the Old Hall.

"Will you stand up, Father Castelli, if it so please you?" said Sir George, his daughter pausing for a moment as if to collect her faculties.

The reverend father rose, and bowed to Sir George.

"Is that the reverend father who married you in the chapel of the Old Hall to Giovanni Ziletto?"

"If he is Father Castelli, yes," she replied.

"May I ask her a question, Sir George? It is painful, but belongs to the investigation of the truth."

"Ask her what you wish, sir," said Sir George.

"It was twilight in the chapel, you said, Miss Talbot; did you see the face of the priest who married you?"

"But dimly, reverend sir," she replied.

"I do not ask you to pledge an oath to God, but are you quite sure it was I who laid hands upon you and blessed you?"

"Giovanni told me so."

"I will not press you further, my poor child. You thought it was I, and he told you so—he, Ziletto?"

"Yes," she said, and leaned for a moment against her father's chair, as the priest sat down and began to speak in whispers to Roubillac and other Italians sitting near.

"Have courage, my child," said Sir George; the girl sighed so, as she looked round the court and seemed for the first time to realize her position.

Then, with such delicate reservation as the pure soul of the woman prompted, she related how they had walked through the meadows and over the moors and across the Dale to My Lady's Bower, where Margaret Dobbs, her dear faithful woman, had received them; and how on other nights she had stolen thither to meet her husband, who had soon intended to acquaint her father with their true position, and, if he should forgive them, as she was sure he would, they could be publicly married in her own church and by her own clergyman; and how bitterly she had repented of her disobedience to her father, but how hopefully she had looked forward to his forgiveness for being married secretly and according to the Romish faith; but never once did she blame Ziletto, never once did she refer to the scene in which he had heartlessly mentioned his speedy return to Italy, nor had she even hinted at any reason for jealousy of him. It was the statement of a self-sacrificing woman,

who is paralleled in our own day by the commonest type of the East End of London, who comes into court bruised and battered, and vows her man was not to blame, and that when he is sober he is the kindest and best of husbands. Mary Talbot loved Ziletto as only women can love; but she did not deceive the women present, nor many of the men, who saw in Ziletto, even under the protection of a secret marriage, nothing less than a vile seducer.

This, however, did not shut their eyes to what they considered duty. He had been ruthlessly murdered, and it was to the honor and credit of Eyam that the crime should be cleared up, and the criminal, whoever he might be, punished according to law. There have, surely, been known instances of this virtuous regard for duty leading the best-intentioned astray in their judgment; and Reuben Clegg stood within this danger.

The hush in court was painful, the silence only disturbed by the breathing of the crowd, as Mary Talbot narrated the incidents of the murder, prefaced, as her story was, by another reference to Ziletto's intention to proclaim their marriage. She had said "Good-night" to her "lord," as she every now and then called him, and he would have her go a few steps forward to see the beauty of the moonlight. It was a moon that disappeared frequently. They were surprised by the sudden challenge of Reuben Clegg. She recalled all that transpired with great vividness; how she rebuked Clegg; how

Ziletto rushed forward to resent the insult Clegg seemed to offer him; how she thought Clegg seized Ziletto, who had drawn his knife upon him; and how, as she stepped forward to interpose, a hand came between them—a hand, as it seemed to her, out of the darkness, and struck Ziletto. At the same moment it seemed as if a voice spoke in a deep whisper; and then Ziletto fell with a groan, and she and Clegg were alone with the dead.

The woman appeared to see the scene as she described it, and when she spoke of being alone with the dead, she covered her face with her hands and leaned against her father's chair. And Francesca Roubillac, with a sudden impulse, rose, pushed her way to her side, took her into her arms, and, her eyes full of tears, said in Italian: "Dear love, my heart bleeds for you; let me be your sister."

Strong men sobbed, in sympathy with the two women and with Sir George. Reuben Clegg turned his head away, and spoke to his mother; and Roubillac sat motionless, watching his wife.

Presently Sir George rose, and said he believed that was the conclusion of Miss Talbot's evidence, unless any one desired to question her. There was no response; but the Italian woman turned to Sir George and addressed him in Italian.

Sir George looked toward Roubillac for an explanation.

"My wife, sir," the Italian said, with perfect calmness, "desires that she may be permitted to have the honor and comfortable satisfaction to

accompany the signora to her home, and attend upon her as a sister."

"What think you, may we now dispense with Mary Talbot's further attendance?" said Sir George, addressing the jury; who, in one voice, as it were, said, "Yes, Sir George; and God be with her!"

"Mary, my love," said Sir George, "would you like this lady to go home with you?"

"Yes, dear," the girl replied.

Francesca, without interpretation, understood both question and answer; and at once placing her arm round the girl, proceeded to lead her forth, the crowd making way for them with many expressions of sympathy.

Thus one of the most touching scenes of the inquest was brought to an end.

So soon as the court had settled down again, and the constable called "Silence!" the Rev. Father Castelli rose to say that he had been summoned by the constable, he hardly knew why, except as a countryman of the deceased; but after the evidence of the beautiful and unhappy daughter of their much-respected chief, Sir George Talbot, he had come to the conclusion that it was to speak to the question of the secret marriage; and it behooved him to declare, in the interest of truth, and the good repute of his Church among them—for they had been most tolerant and kind in their regard for what had been called an alien faith, of which he was a humble servant—it became him as a priest, and he might say for the time being a citizen, to

proclaim that he had not married this young lady to the man, Ziletto; nor, indeed, had he celebrated any sacrament, except in the course of duty among his own flock, and not once among them the ceremony of marriage.

Sir George and the jury were considerably taken aback at this declaration; as was also Reuben Clegg, for the secret marriage had been a comfort to him. He had hated himself above all things for doubting the honor of Mary Talbot.

"Are you the only priest at the Old Hall?" asked Sir George.

"Yes, Sir George, there is no other."

"Would it be possible that one of your fellow countrymen could have taken upon himself your holy office, and performed the ceremony?"

"It would be sacrilege, Sir George."

"Yes; but it might occur?"

"It would be most improbable, with all due respect, Sir George."

"Improbable, but possible?" persisted Sir George.

"I should say, knowing my people, not possible, Sir George."

"But, reverend sir, I would have sworn on my life that it would not have been possible for any one to have persuaded my daughter to step aside from the path in which she knew I would desire her to walk—and is there a man among your Italians who is under stronger duty of love and obedience than a daughter to a devoted father?"

"You touch my heart, Sir George," said the priest, "but there is a Higher Power and a

greater influence than the earthly love of a father."

"Yes, I suppose there is: I had not thought of it. Then, it comes to this conclusion, Father Castelli; it would be possible for one of your flock to masquerade as a priest to the undoing of a virtuous and loving girl, but in so doing he would be running his soul into damnation?"

"Yes, Sir George, most assuredly he would."

"Then, Sir Priest," said Sir George, rising to his full height, "may the soul of the coward who did this thing be damned to all eternity!"

"Amen—ten thousand times, Amen!" said Reuben Clegg; and every one rose to his feet, and there was a great commotion.



## CHAPTER THIRTY-FOUR

### THE CONDEMNATION OF REUBEN CLEGG

SILENCE having been once more restored, the inquiry was continued. Though the constable was an ignorant man, hatred of Clegg had considerably sharpened his wit. He had sufficient legal acumen to know that, given a strong disclosure of "malice prepense" against Clegg, the chances were strongly in favor of his committal. So Dakin, in marshaling the evidence before the court, managed to emphasize those incidents that proved Clegg to be an open enemy of Ziletto. Moreover, he endeavored to set up a prejudice against Clegg as a skeptic in religion and a foe

to law and order, posing, himself, as the representative of the latter by virtue of his office.

Clegg writhed under this covert attack, which was too insidious for full appreciation by the villagers. Sir George, however, noted it, and Clegg observed how frequently the deputy-corporator strove to give a better complexion to circumstances that seemed to tell against Clegg than the constable contrived to get down upon the depositions which Sir George's clerk was carefully putting into black and white.

"You'n heard the prisoner," began Dakin, taking an opportunity to put a cross-examining question to Radford.

"Prisoner!" said Sir George. "What do you mean, Dakin? What prisoner? Of whom are you speaking?"

"I humbly ask your pardon," said the constable. "I should have said the witness. It was but a slip o' the tongue."

"That's nothing new i' the constable," said Clegg. "If every slip o' the tongue he made shot his heels into the air, he'd 'a' broken his back ere this!"

Jury and spectators laughed heartily at Clegg's sally, but the clerk looking up from his papers, responded with "Silence, silence!"

"If thou slips through the hangman's noose before th's done, it'll be a rare piece o' luck for thee, I'm thinkin'," said the constable, purple with anger.

"Dakin! Dakin! how dare you offer such a remark!" exclaimed Sir George.

"I humbly ask your pardon, Sir George; I was provoked," Dakin replied, at once realizing the mistake he had made, not so much as concerned the dignity of his office as the bias he had exhibited against Clegg.

"It's true I have heard Clegg say 'Curse the Italians!' and it's true I'n heard him jeer at constable; but he isn't the only man i' Eyam that's jeered at owd 'Wait-a-bait,' " said Radford.

"That will do, Radford," answered the constable, looking at him with a superior air, amid a general titter.

"Nay, it winna do; nowt o't sort," said Radford. "You ax me a question, I'n a right to reply; and if I die for it I will say thou'rt a meddlesome curmudgeon."

"Stand down, Radford," said Sir George. "I am most willing that every man shall have his due license in cross-examination by the constable; but such remarks as your's can only end in a brawl, and an injustice to the peaceful reputation of Eyam."

"I thank you, Sir George. It seems to me that there's a sort of dead-set against Master Clegg; and in your fairness, Sir George, as he's your friend, as one may say, you donnat do him justice."

"Stand down, Radford!"

"Yes, Sir George," said Radford, resuming his seat, amid a murmur of applause.

"Nay," said Clegg, rising, "I want no more than is fair and square, so far as I'm concerned; and if the constable has his knife into me, it's

only natural, I suppose, seeing that I've had him often on the hip."

"I wish to observe," said the constable, interrupting Clegg, "that I never said a word about any knife."

"Nor has Clegg," said Sir George, "except in the way of metaphor."

"I humbly thank you, Sir George. I donnat know what fine meaning he may give to this" (flinging down a heavy weapon upon the table), "but in Eyam we call it a knife, and I found it an hour or two back at Clegg's cottage; and, moreover, buried i' the garden, this jerkin." (He dragged from beneath the table the jerkin Mrs. Clegg had hidden on her impulse of fear the night before.) "It's a good deal saturated wi' blood."

If the constable had timed the moment for producing these incriminating, if dumb, witnesses, he could not have created a more profound sensation. Sir George leaned back in his chair and wiped the perspiration from his face. The only man in court who was not greatly moved was Clegg himself.

"Sir George," he said, "it is true these things belong to me, but—"

"I would advise you to wait, Clegg, until the constable has finished. His action is most irregular at this point of the proceedings, but he has possibly been moved to it by our own interruptions." (Then turning to his clerk.) "Perhaps it had been better that we had observed a more strict regard to the form and ceremony of the quest."

"I have taken down sworn testimony, Sir George."

"Very well. If you think it wise to explain, Master Clegg, or justify these exhibits against you, I will hear you—"

"Pardon me," said Vicars, the foreman; "Mrs. Clegg appears to be taken sick."

Clegg turned at once to his mother, who had fallen forward in her chair. He raised her up.

"What is it, mother?"

"Take me into the air, Reuben."

An opening was at once made by the crowd, and Reuben, lifting his mother into his arms, carried her out. As she lay with her head upon his shoulder she whispered, "God forgive me, Reuben, I was afeared, and I buried thy blood-stained jerkin; I didna' remember thou hadst carried the man all wet to the inn."

"Dear mother, it's no matter; thou didst it for the best."

"Reuben, God has forsaken us," she replied. "Thou'rt lost, lad, thou'rt lost! Speed thee away, now. There's a horse yonder, i' Radford's stables. Speed thee away, lad! God has turned from us. He no longer hears thy mother's prayers. I'n lost all faith, this minute. Get thee gone, lad; fly! I know thou'rt innocent; but how often have they led the lamb to the slaughter—fly, I tell thee, fly!"

"Nay, mother, that may not be," said Reuben; "it would look like guilt. Come back into th' court, and if the truth doesna' prevail there's no more to be said. Perhaps thy God is only

trying thy faith: nay, I wouldna' give Him up."

"Oh, Reuben, Reuben, I have not deserved to be deserted of God! I canna' tax mysen' wi' an ungrateful thing, wi' a sinful wish; but when I saw the blood upon thy jerkin I never thowt me o' the innocence of it, seeing as thou carried him to the inn."

"Never thee mind, mother; come back into the court, and we'll see it out together. There's not a man or woman there who does not honor thee."

At the doorway and in the passage to the court-room a clear way was made to Mrs. Clegg's place at the table. Every one moved aside in silence and in awe; for it had become known, while Reuben was talking to his mother, that the constable had made a formal objection to Clegg leaving the place. In spite of Sir George's disapproval, Dakin had asserted that he considered Clegg his prisoner, whatever might be the verdict of the jury.

"Before we proceed further," said Sir George, addressing Clegg with undisguised emotion, "I must inform you that you are formally charged with the murder of the man Ziletto. Understand, it is not the charge of this court, which is a court of inquiry—not a judicial bench, but a crowner's quest. The constable, as I have explained to him, has taken a most unusual course, and one that cannot fail to prejudice his position and discount his evidence."

"My blood be upon my own head," said the

constable, in a curious and desperate way; "but duty is duty."

"And discretion is discretion; and discipline of temper is not a qualification to be despised in a public officer," said Sir George.

"Who is my accuser?" asked Clegg.

"Constable Dakin conceives it to be his duty to let this court of investigation into the cause of the death of Giovanni Ziletto understand that he charges you with the man's murder; he is justified, he says, by information in his possession and by these silent witnesses—the jerkin that he swears you wore last night, and the knife with bloodstains upon it, the jerkin buried in your garden, the knife hidden away in a cupboard. I am bound to tell you, under the circumstances, that the constable is within his right to consider you under arrest; but at the same time you are not to understand that you are necessarily on your trial before this jury. Your position is, to all of us, I feel sure, one which commands our sympathy and regret; to me it is one of great pain."

A murmur of sympathy stirred the court, followed by a dead silence.

Clegg, holding his mother's trembling hand, said: "I am as innocent of the death of the Italian, Ziletto, as any man present can be. The evidence given by Miss Talbot was true, every word of it. Have you gotten it down in your book, Master Clerk?"

"Yes, sir," said the clerk.

"Then I'll be content to say it is true, and

that is my account of the affair. As to my hating the Italian, I acknowledge it."

"Master Clegg—friend, let me say," interrupted Sir George, "I have to warn you that everything you say may be used against you on your trial, should it be your misfortune to be committed by the jury now assembled or by a magisterial court."

"Thank you, Sir George; then I will speak more slowly, that the clerk may not miss anything I have to say—but say it I will. So I will ask you to offer me no more warnings, and at the same time I will request this man you call constable to stop glaring at me, lest I smite him where he stands."

A loud shout of applause greeted this threat. Clegg was not the only one who had observed the ferocious aspect of the constable, who, from a harmless kind of officious fool, had suddenly become a venomous overmastering official, a village inquisitor, who would glory in pinioning his enemy and casting him into the condemned cell.

"Constable," said Sir George, "take your place by the clerk, and neither provoke the witness by word nor look, at the risk of the court's severe admonition."

"I humbly thank you, Sir George," said the constable, his otherwise rubicund face all puckered up, his mouth twitching, his eyes half hidden in a scowl that to many seemed to give him a new countenance, several persons remarking, when all was over, that he was so changed all in a minute that they would hardly have known him.

“The jerkin which the constable has produced is mine. It is true that I wore it last night. My mother, not considering that a man could not carry a bleeding corpse half a mile or more, without taking upon his jerkin some of the red evidence of death, feared for her son and buried the thing; so she has just told me.”

The constable smiled in a ghastly way at the clerk. Most of the jurymen relieved the tension of their minds with a sigh, whether of satisfaction or doubt it was not possible to say. The further silence was only broken by the breathing of the lookers-on. Mrs. Clegg appeared to be unconscious, but she was praying God to forgive her the doubt of His goodness, and appealing for His interposition in favor of her son.

“The knife, too, is mine,” went on Reuben, “but I have not worn it for many months, and the stains upon it are not stains of blood. I don’t question the honesty of the witnesses who have been called, but in most cases the truth has been distorted so as to make it seem a lie. The constable has done all in his power to make white seem black, and, as Master Radford found it so have I, that the deputy-coroner himself, with an idea of being impartial, has permitted Dakin to give a bias to evidence that had no right to be brought forward. Nay, Sir George, I am on my defense, as it seems, and it is meet I avow what is in my mind. My own and your daughter’s account of the death of the man Ziletto shows no flaw of any kind. Before God and man she was his wife, and I shall ask you to call

Signor Roubillac on the question of who it was that married them."

Bernardo Roubillac, who was sitting in the body of the extemporized court-room, looked up with a frank smile of approval, and nodded to Vicars, the foreman of the jury, intimating his willingness to make a deposition.

"As for the dead Italian, I own that I hated him," continued Clegg. "It is true that he and I had words some time back, words and blows; that he drew a knife upon me; equally true that I spared him when I might have broken his back, as he deserved, a scheming, evil-minded seducer and fiend in human shape."

"Reuben!" said Mrs. Clegg, aroused from her silent prayers. "Reuben!"

"And I donnat deny that I have a great and an abiding contempt for the man Dakin—a meddlesome busybody, weighted with the petty authority of the constable's office and abusing it to the common danger and unrest."

"Reuben!" whispered Mrs. Clegg, clutching at his sleeve, "donnat fly i' the face of the magistrate; Dakin is his officer, and—"

"Nay, bide thee still, mother," said Reuben, turning aside for a moment from his general and fearless survey of the jury and the crowd, "truth's often hid deep and is as difficult to come at as the richest mineral treasure buried i' the bowels of the earth; but it's there all the same, and on that I build my trust."

"God knows thee, my lad," his mother answered, more by way of speaking to herself than

to the court, "knows thee for thy honest soul; but one should not always defy the schemes of the wicked."

"Because I dislike the constable, because I hated the dastardly foreigner, is that any reason that I should lower my manhood and disgrace my nationality by murder? I, Reuben Clegg, with a record in the Hundred of the Peak, the friend and partner of its noblest son, Sir George Talbot; a willful man, perhaps, outspoken when it might have been better to be reserved, but never underhand, never a waster, never a plotter, and one who always respected women. And that is all I have to say at present, except that I would rather die a thousand deaths than stand i' the shoes of the mock priest who gave Mary Talbot into the hands of the villain who is lying dead in the room upstairs; and as for being in any way the cause of bringing a slur on the fair fame of the house of Talbot, and the honor of that young woman who stood before you and told her story of betrayal, and in so doing did honor to her name and race and evidenced a penitent duty to her generous father, I would rather have courted the assassin's knife or any other death. After all, life is not worth having without honor and respect. Sir George said something about my committal for trial; well, I'm willing. It will be a sore grief to this dear old woman by my side, but she will find consolation, I make no doubt, and I fervently hope so, in that religious faith that has not spared her son from this dark, unhappy, and unjust hour; though I have suffi-

cient faith in the natural righting of things to believe that this mystery will be unraveled, and that yonder constable will not be overlooked in the ultimate reckoning."

Sir George sat watching Clegg with a calm expression of sympathy and pity, and when his friend and neighbor sat down he still kept his eyes fixed upon him, not heeding the expressions of approval and pitying sobs that broke out from all parts of the room; for there were many women present. The deputy-coroner was, however, presently aroused by the voice of Roubillac, who, in broken, but understandable English, expressed his readiness to give evidence, and was duly sworn upon his oath to tell "the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth." He spoke with a natural air of honesty and good-will that captivated his hearers, most of whom suddenly found themselves recalling the fact that he made the most beautiful and Christian design of all the Well-dressings, and the women looked upon him with interest as the husband of the strangely beautiful woman who had taken Mary Talbot to her arms and had begged to go home with her, an incident that had moved every heart in the court.

"On the unhappy night of the death of my confrère—my comrade—it is most true that I saw Signor Clegg standing in what you call a pose of suspicion, making watch of Ziletto; but what more natural? They were in rivalry for the hand of Signorina Talbot, the beautiful daughter of Sir George. I make bold to say this, since it accounts for what others have said in what I

believe to be an unrighteous condemnation. You tell me I must not offer opinions, but state what I saw. It is perhaps because I am foreign to your customs that I find this difficult, but I would say that the signorina, loving Ziletto, would not be likely to make shield of the man, Clegg, if he had done this deed."

Roubillac looked round the court for approval of this suggestion, and was met with cries of "The Italian's right," "That's true," and so on.

"What I want you to ask the witness, Mr. Foreman Vicars, or you, Sir George," said Clegg, "is concerning the secret marriage of Ziletto and your daughter."

Sir George thereupon intimated that not only as a Court of Inquiry, but as a community, they would like to know his views on the subject just mentioned by Reuben Clegg; the clerk would only take such note of his reply as might be evidence; he might speak fearlessly, as he, Sir George, hoped and believed he would truthfully.

"Then it is thus, Sir George Talbot, and you, citizens of this great country. I believe there was a ceremony; I do verily believe that in her own esteem, and even before the Throne of the Almighty, your daughter is the widow of Giovanni Ziletto; but I do not think any ordained priest performed the ceremony she has avouched."

The people had breathed an inarticulate "Thank God!" at the expression of Roubillac's opinion as to the widowhood of the village beauty, which, however, was instantly checked by the assertion that the marriage was not a valid one.

"Why do you think so?" asked Clegg, quietly.

"For the reason already given by the only authorized clergyman of our Faith now resident among us," said Roubillac.

"Since we have become a kind of village council on this most unhappy matter, rather than an official jury, will you please state what theory you have formed, if any, touching the ceremony my daughter has described?"

"What has become of the person who officiated as the valet or secretary of the dead Ziletto?" asked Roubillac, by way of answer.

"When you ask that question, do you imply that 'twas he who usurped the office of priest, and so deceived Miss Talbot, otherwise Signora Ziletto?" asked Clegg.

"It does not become me to impugn the honesty of an absent man, even though he was not my compatriot," said Roubillac, "but a Frenchman."

"I do not see the force of that qualification," said Sir George. "We are no respecters of persons, Signor Roubillac." (Turning now to the constable.) "Is anything known of the man in question?"

"It is some time since he left the village, bound for London, for what purpose I am unable to say; but the papers of the deceased Giovanni Ziletto may inform you on examination, Sir George, with all humble submission."

"Very well," said Sir George. Turning once more to Roubillac, "Is that all you have to say, having regard to the ceremony that was performed in the Catholic chapel of the Old Hall?"

"Yes, signor," said Roubillac.

"You were a friend of the dead man?"

"Yes."

"A great friend?"

"He was my compatriot, and an artist."

"Did you at any time have any altercation with him?"

"Oh, yes, but not here; in Venice. But we were reconciled."

"Where were you when this assassination took place?"

"At the Old Hall, with the reverend father and others at supper."

"Had this Ziletto any enemy among your people?"

"Not to my knowledge."

It was remembered in after years that Father Castelli withdrew from the court-room before this cross-examination was finished.

Roubillac, in conclusion, expressed the deep concern of his countrymen that through their presence any scandal should have fallen upon Eyam; but they desired to say that Ziletto was really not of their party: he had come to Eyam of his own will, and had been received with favor by the reverend the clergy of the Protestant church, and also by the magistrate himself. Any one of his compatriots would have made great sacrifices to have spared the people who had received them so kindly from any sorrow or perplexity; and they would render every assistance in their power to unravel the mystery that surrounded Ziletto's death, and to prove the in-

nocence of Master Clegg, in which they all most fervently believed.

And Signor Roubillac was evidently much moved, as were many of the lookers-on, certain of his fellow-countrymen more particularly.

It was night before the last witness was examined. The court was adjourned for a few minutes, while the candles were lighted. Sir George had time to go round to the Manor House and see how it fared with his daughter. He found her sitting silently in her own room, her head upon the bosom of the Italian woman, who looked up at him with a tender smile on her pale face. Mrs. Dobbs was also in attendance; her heart all too full for words. Sir George stooped to kiss Mary and press her hand. He did not speak, but presently beckoned Mrs. Dobbs from the room, to learn that neither Francesca nor his daughter had said a word. Mary seemed to cling to the foreign woman, Mrs. Dobbs said, and she had not disturbed them; it was better, she thought, to let such grief have its quiet way. And so Sir George went back to the great house-place of the inn where he was holding his quest. It was now illuminated with bunches of candles in sconces about the room, and one or two tall attenuated dips upon the table, where the jury had resumed their places. The blinds were not drawn, and the moon, which had risen as it appeared to Sir George with a strange speed, was filtering a broad beam of soft light through the diamond panes of the window over the heads

of the little crowd that still thronged the front of the inn.

Sir George had forgotten that he had lingered on his way from his house; first by the Manor House Well and then in the roadway, without any object that was apparent for delaying his return. He might have been trying to regard the entire bad business as a dream, an effort that had been made over and over again by his daughter. Then suddenly, having laid aside his sorrow, he picked it up again and carried it into the court-room, way being made for him through the village throng with respect and sympathy.

The moon shone out full and clear before Sir George rose to sum up the evidence. Mrs. Clegg watched him with fascinated interest. It seemed to her that Reuben's life depended upon the deputy-coroner's words. There was hope in this. From the first she had experienced a fateful fear that Reuben was meshed in a net from which he could not escape; the more innocent he was, the more she feared his condemnation. It was as if Fate had conspired against him, and Divine Providence had deserted him. Father Castelli had returned to the court. Roubillac had never left it. The constable had kept his eye steadily upon Clegg, who had sat through the adjournment, his mother's hand in his. Vicars, the foreman of the jury had been outside to stretch his legs and air his importance among his fellow-villagers. Radford had kept his seat at the back of the room, taking no note of anybody or anything, for he feared the constable had entangled

the feet of his prisoner, so as to make escape a difficult problem. Mrs. Radford and their daughter had sought to rouse him from his lethargy; but Radford only said, "Let me a-be."

Sir George reviewed the evidence with an almost strained impartiality. He was so anxious to fulfill his duties correctly that he laid more emphasis than was really necessary upon the points that appeared to tell against Clegg, more particularly those which might be regarded as suggesting premeditation to meet Ziletto, premeditation to kill him. He did not even pass over the question of rivalry for his daughter's hand, nor the unexplained presence of Clegg near My Lady's Bower at an unseemly hour, an hour which under the circumstances was not strange in the case of the deceased, who was his daughter's husband. It was true that the clergyman known as Father Castelli, by whom she believed herself to have been married to Ziletto, intimated that some one had impersonated him; but to all intents and purposes, in view of all the conditions of the case, his daughter was the widow of the dead man. A sympathetic murmur of approval went up on all hands, and Clegg was glad that Sir George took this view with his daughter, who would thus find some small relief touching her injured innocence and dignity and the violence she had done to her father's feelings in making a secret union with Ziletto. Sir George, after relating to the jury the sad story, and commenting on its legal and moral features, his heart torn with misery the while, pointed out to them

the several courses that were open for them to pursue, and then left them to consider their verdict.

The constable asked if they would like to retire to another room, or have this one cleared while they deliberated; to which they said "No," and at once proceeded to take counsel with each other in subdued tones, occasionally pausing to ask Sir George or his clerk a question. Presently they came to a decision, which, being formulated by the clerk, was to the effect that to the best of their judgment, according to the evidence that had been sworn before them, Giovanni Ziletto had come by his death violently, and they found a verdict of "Willful murder against some person or persons unknown."

So far, therefore, as they were concerned, they acquitted Reuben Clegg of any complicity in the crime. The verdict was received with applause. The constable stepped forward, nevertheless, and claimed Reuben Clegg as his prisoner, on the charge of being privy to Ziletto's death. But for the interposition of Sir George, he would have been assaulted by the villagers, who saw in Dakin's action nothing short of a malicious and vengeful persecution.

"Come what may," said Clegg, "I will not surrender to Humphrey Dakin."

"But you will surrender to me," said a powerful-looking man, who had just pushed his way into the court, his horse, in a white lather, being tied to the stoop by the outer porch.

"Master Summers Wood," said Sir George,

“you make a timely, if regrettable appearance.”

“I am here by order of Sir Walter Cantrill, your fellow Justice of the Peace; and I beg that Master Reuben Clegg will make a peaceful surrender to the warrant I hold for his arrest.”

The new-comer handed a document to Sir George, who pronounced it to be in order.

“Master Clegg, I conceive, has no other course but to make submission,” said Sir George; “and I may observe that before my neighbor, Sir Walter, a magistrate of known honorable impartiality and high moral repute, he will have the opportunity to complete his proper defense, calling evidence and making plain all the circumstances in his favor, which, to my thinking, he has neglected in this inquiry.”

“I thank you, Sir George. If a man’s innocence is to be put into the scale against innuendo, malice, fateful coincidence and the like, it seems to me it may need more than truth to make it apparent; but I leave myself in the hands of my countrymen and the Law.”

Dakin, it will be seen, had lost no time in anticipating the possible verdict of the crowner’s quest; though its finding made no legal difference to the position he had taken up. His messenger to another magistrate had, however, so well explained the prejudice in favor of Clegg and the difficulty of Dakin’s position, the violence of the man, his physical strength, his known threats, and his notorious atheism (Sir Walter Cantrill was a strict Presbyterian), that imme-

diate action had been taken to bring Clegg before an impartial Justice, who would have no difficulty in sending the case for trial at the forthcoming jail delivery for the county.

And so it came to pass that, at the next Assize, Reuben Clegg was arraigned, found guilty, and sentenced to be hanged.

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## CHAPTER THIRTY-FIVE

### BAR, BENCH, AND PRISONER

REUBEN CLEGG was the victim of a deftly handled case of circumstantial evidence. Moreover, the accused made a bad impression upon the jury. His manner was both arrogant and defiant. He more than once interrupted the evidence, in spite of rebukes from the judge. The prosecuting lawyer had taken a special pride in presenting the case to counsel with every detail of apparent "malice aforethought" on the part of the prisoner.

There was an element of romance in the case that lifted it out of the common ruck of trials. Master Summers Wood, in his collection of evidence, had taken into his inner consciousness something of the tone of Sir Walter Cantrill's prejudice against Clegg, whose independence of thought and expression in regard to religion he resented with the intensity of a bigot and the partiality of an inferior intellect. Clegg's avowed

hostility to the Italian, his acknowledged encounter with him, and his challenge to meet him with whatever weapon he might choose, their rivalry for the hand of Miss Talbot, Clegg's shadowing of the Italian on the night of the murder, his quarrel with him in Miss Talbot's presence, and the almost immediate stabbing of the deceased, were set forth to the jury by counsel with close fidelity to the known facts and a subtle interpretation of doubtful points. The burial of Clegg's blood-stained jerkin, the finding of a knife, which Clegg denied to be blood-stained, but which was proved to be thus indelibly marked, though in reality of no proper moment in the story, carried weight with the jury; and the things had an ugly appearance as they lay before the court by the side of other legal exhibits.

Counsel regarded the statement of Miss Talbot about the hand that reached out of the darkness, and the shadowy figure that came between Clegg and Ziletto, as a charitable effort on the part of the witness to shield her rejected lover and the friend of her father that was not to be taken seriously—not the smallest tittle of evidence having been forthcoming to show that any other person had been seen in the immediate neighborhood at the time, or that any other person besides Clegg had any cause of quarrel with Ziletto, or had expressed any animosity toward him. Indeed, the presence elsewhere of nearly every person in the village at the time of the murder could be accounted for. The mystery of the strange and not unromantic union of Ziletto with Mary Tal-

bot by some unordained person, confederate with Ziletto as it seemed, was no doubt explained by the suggestion of Signor Bernardo Roubillac, who, at the inquest held by the deputy-coroner at Eyam, had asked what had become of the mysterious individual who had acted as Ziletto's body-servant, and who had disappeared without leaving the slightest clew to his whereabouts.

For the defense, counsel had argued that if this was the man who had usurped Father Castelli's sacred place in the chapel of the Old Hall, he might also be the fourth person in the melancholy incident that had led to the arraignment of Reuben Clegg, about whose innocence, he contended, no unprejudiced mind could have any doubt whatever. The learned advocate dwelt upon the manful character of the prisoner, his honest, open life, his fearlessness—the fearlessness of innocence—and the prejudice that had been imported into the case on account of his religious belief, or, as his learned friend had suggested, his lack of religious belief—his denial of all evidence of Divine interposition in human affairs, his Atheism in short, which the prisoner repudiated, holding, as he no doubt did, a reverent belief in that first great originating cause of all things which they called God, and which the prisoner called Nature. He maintained that it was an outrage upon the fair and impartial administration of justice to permit questions of doctrine to give a bias to the minds of the jury in the interpretation of evidence. He deeply regretted to see that the prosecution had permitted,

and, indeed, had encouraged this bias against the prisoner, who, in every relation of life, had proved himself to be an honorable and worthy citizen.

If the prosecution had left no stone unturned that might bring about the prisoner's condemnation, the defense was conducted with no less skill; but all to no purpose. The jury were strangers to Clegg; they had not lived in Eyam to know and judge of his character as the jury of the crowner's quest had; they had not seen him build up his career of honesty and independence; they had no knowledge of the friendship of Sir George Talbot for the prisoner; had never seen the prisoner's mother until that day of the trial; and counsel for the prosecution had urged them not to let it be said that they were indifferent to the assassination of a stranger who had trusted to the hospitality and honor of the country, who in a spirit of good feeling had taken part in the local celebration of the Wells, and whose only crime was that he had fallen in love with the belle of the village, whom he would have married openly if he had believed he could have obtained the consent of her father.

It was on this point that counsel for the defense had found his opportunity to demolish what he stigmatized as the maudlin sentimentality, not to say indecent condonement, of the prosecution's treatment of the union of Ziletto and Mary Talbot, "a union that was characterized by meanness and fraud, a union that was the grossest act of deceit that a man could put upon a woman, a

fraud that was sacrilegious, and worse than a common seduction."

A buzz of reawakened interest moved the crowded court at these words; Mary Talbot clung closer to her father's side, the prisoner flushed for a moment with a passing sense of the glory of free speech, the jury were moved with a new impulse of interest in the case, and counsel, with the dignity of a judge pronouncing judgment, continued his denunciation of the deceased.

"I am grieved, my lord and gentlemen of the jury, to be compelled to put this feature of the case in its proper light. My learned friend, counsel for the prosecution, forces me to do so. He has, with a dexterity that is to be deplored rather than admired, endeavored to disparage the prisoner by the importation of an element of meretricious sentiment into the relationship of Mary Talbot and Giovanni Ziletto that might be well calculated to excite, in the minds of the unreflecting, a feeling of pity for the man who is dead, thus importing an added prejudice against the prisoner. But in the estimation of every thoughtful Englishman who does not forget the respect due to his mother, this scoundrel Ziletto, this betrayer of a pure and lovely woman, this ruffian who had outraged the hospitality of an English village to betray the sweet and innocent daughter of its chief and most respected inhabitant, was as hateful in his life as he must be despised in his death. Considering the nature of his offense, it might well be that the hand of

Heaven was active in his removal from a world in which he was not fit to live."

From a murmur of approval there arose at the back of the court, among a group of Eyamites, a shout of applause, which prompted the judge to administer more than a mild rebuke to counsel for what he conceived to be an extraordinary trespass on the privileges of the bar, the dignity of the court, and the decent observance of the motto, "*Mortuis non conviciandum*"; but the advocate's blood was up, and as if inspired by the courage and innocence of the prisoner, and in sympathy with the beautiful girl who had been so shamefully betrayed, he faced the judge, and with an impatient gesture continued his denunciation of Ziletto.

"My lord, I bow to your rebuke, with such respectful submission as the discipline of the bar and your high authority may command, but I am not to be stayed in what I conceive to be the performance of my duty by the questionable wit of a fusty proverb. Judas is dead. Do we speak well of him? Tarquin is no more. Did the ancients, who made that proverb, speak well of him? Shall I acquit Giovanni Ziletto, who was the worst of the three, because he has been slain at the very height of his villainy? No, my lord; nor, furthermore, will I hesitate to say that the earth is well rid of one whose existence was a reproach to his Maker. 'Twere hard that any man should suffer for his death, even if he were guilty of it; but if the 'manes' of such a creature are to have a sacrifice, let it not be the innocent

man who has borne the ignominy of standing in the dock for a crime of which all his antecedents show him to be utterly incapable, and whose conduct before the court during these proceedings has been that of an upright and honorable man."

Nevertheless, the jury returned a verdict of "Guilty," and the judge, without holding out the smallest hope of reprieve, sentenced the prisoner to death—a fiat that seemed at once to have slain Clegg's mother, who was carried out of court. Mary Talbot was hardly less overcome; and Clegg himself stood gazing vacantly on the scene, as if he had not realized what had happened, until a warder touched him upon the shoulder and he submitted to be removed.

That same night, Roubillac and his wife left for Italy. He claimed that, so far as his work was concerned, it was completed. He had made all the necessary designs. These would now be carried out by the workmen whom he left behind. Moreover, his wife's health was suffering, and he feared to subject her to the severity of another winter in the Peak. Father Castelli knew that Roubillac had only come to Eyam to escape Ziletto. He and his wife had contemplated an excuse for returning to Italy as soon as Ziletto had appeared in the North. Now that he was dead, their plans of life need no longer be other than those which had only been disarranged by Ziletto's conspiracy against their happiness.

## CHAPTER THIRTY-SIX

## CLEGG ESCAPES FROM PRISON

PRISON-BREAKING in those days was not an infrequent occurrence; and yet the escape of Reuben Clegg, within a week of his condemnation and during the signing of a petition in his favor headed by the leading men of the North, created a profound sensation.

It was thought that one or more officers of the prison had been bribed to facilitate the prisoner's flight, for not only had he been able to remove the bars of his cell and to scale the walls of the prison-yard, but, beyond the debris that littered his track within the jail, no trace of him was to be found on the outside of the stronghold.

A magisterial inquiry discovered a breach of regulations that, without assistance, could alone have enabled the prisoner to escape. After condemnation it was understood that a prisoner was under surveillance night and day; but this precaution had fallen into abeyance. Capital punishment was not limited, as in our day, to cases of willful murder. They hanged a man for horse-stealing, forgery, house-breaking, highway robbery, and for many minor offenses. It may well have come to pass, therefore, that the regulation which gave the condemned criminal a continual companion in a watchful warder should fall into disuse.

Escapes from constables and the round-houses or lock-ups of villages and towns were common enough, and recaptures were unusual. The Jack Sheppards and Spring-heel Jacks of the following century had their predecessors in the ages before them. What surprises one most, in reading up the criminal history of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, is the easy way in which criminals, detected in one district, simply removed to another and renewed their depredations, and thus continued careers of crime year after year without arrest; and in the event of arrest and escape, how little and how futile were the efforts at recapture.

The tragedy at Eyam and the romance of Reuben Clegg, his defiant attitude before the jury, the bold defense of counsel, the scene between the Bench and the Bar, the curious romance of the story and the unexpected condemnation of Clegg, had lifted the case out of the ordinary catalogue of the current Assize, at which some dozen malefactors had been sentenced to be hanged. An ordinary prisoner escaping, the general public would probably have heard nothing of it; but the escape of Clegg at once became notorious, to lapse, however, into the usual nine days' wonder and soon become forgotten, except in that little mountain village of the Peak, where it was an incident of daily note and comment.

The annual Wake of Eyam was an institution of such local importance that even the execution of Clegg would not have put it aside, any more

than harvest or Christmas; but everybody admitted that the event was relieved of a great shadow by the knowledge that Reuben Clegg was at liberty; for, apart from the sympathy that was felt for his mother and the Talbots, nobody, except the constable, believed in his guilt, and in Dakin's conviction there was undoubtedly the impulse of malice.

Ever since it had become an assured fact that Clegg was at large, Dakin had slept with a loaded pistol by his side, and many a night he had started up in his dreams to use it against the attack of Clegg. It had been borne in upon the constable's troubled mind that it was his fate to be murdered in the night. Nowhere in the village was he received with even a shadow of cordiality. Sir George Talbot observed his humble salute with the barest recognition; the Rev. George Mompesson had almost created a scandal in the village by refusing to administer the Holy Sacrament to him on the Sundays set apart for that solemn celebration; Radford did not check his hostility to the constable; and Vicars, with all his suavity, found it difficult to be civil to him.

Mary Talbot went about the village, as was her former habit, visiting the poor, helping the sick, and taking her share in the management of local affairs. The Mompesson children welcomed her with delight, as they had always done when she visited the rectory, but their greetings were no longer boisterous; they had, with the adults of the village, come under the

influence of a certain wistful expression in her eyes and a sedateness of manner that touched their hearts and brought from them a sympathetic response of feeling. She now and then walked to Mrs. Clegg's cottage and sat with her, and talked of Reuben, and wondered with her where he was, and encouraged her to hope for his speedy return; for the petition for his pardon was still being signed. Sir George had employed agents in every part of the county to increase its length and importance, and was continually engaged in correspondence with the authorities in London.

Mrs. Clegg had found comfort in prayer. She regarded her son's escape as a Divine interposition. His angel had unlocked the prison gates, as one day He would unlock his heart to the comforting messages of Jesus Christ and a grateful belief in the saving grace of the Cross.

Several of the Italians, following the example of Roubillac, had returned to their native land. Those who remained rarely came into the village. Father Castelli had, however, continued to cultivate the friendship of Sir George and the Mompessons, and responded promptly to any inquiries touching the painful incident of the impersonation of himself in the union of Mary Talbot and his countryman, Ziletto. It was on the suggestion of Mr. Mompesson that the kindly priest had opened up a correspondence with his brother of Venice, Father Lorenzo, in view of an application to the Pope to confirm the marriage of Mary and Ziletto, so that, in truth and

according to the Catholic Church, she might be what she claimed to be, the legal widow of Giovanni Ziletto. The priest did not apprise them of the almost impossible character of their plea; but he nevertheless reported it to Lorenzo, and they discussed it by letter. Mr. Mompesson argued that, their Church accepting the infallibility of the Pope, his holiness could do this thing; and if not, he was not sure in his own mind that it could not be achieved in England by an Act of Parliament. Nothing seemed impossible to Mompesson in such a case, where the union had been solemnized in the words of the Catholic Church and before its altar; but the rector of Eyam was an enthusiast for the right, and he loved Mary Talbot as devotedly as if she had been his own daughter, and his wife regarded her as a sister.

Furthermore, with adversity there had come to Mary Talbot a dignity of speech and an elevation of manner that appeared to give her something of the attribute of saintship. And yet there was nothing austere in the change; if it was saint-like, it was sweet and gracious, but uplifted, and it was characteristic of the cheerfulness of a heavenly martyrdom. In former days, when the most daring lads of the Hundred hardly ventured upon a smiling glance at her as she took her father's arm on the Sabbath, and left the church while the choir sang its voluntary as the congregation left the sacred house, there were still, now and then, youngsters from a distance, visiting at the Old Hall or passing through

the Peak, who challenged her attention with admiring glances; but now, the humblest looked at her without fear and with undisguised meaning: that they were hers, body and soul, her champions, her fellow-villagers, sworn believers in her word, every one of them, never once forgetting to call her Madam or Signora Ziletto, or the good widow Ziletto, or the good Sir George's widowed daughter.

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## CHAPTER THIRTY-SEVEN

### ZILETTO'S FATAL GIFT

AND so time passed, and the village Wake came on. It was originally the parochial feast of the dedication of the church. At the time of this history it had already become what it remains to-day throughout the Midlands, the principal village holiday of the year, and it lasted then, as it does at the present day, for a whole week. In the spring Eyam had its Well-dressing, and in the autumn its Wake; the latter a festival of holiday and mirth, a re-union of friends, a renewal of clothes, a cleaning of houses, and a feast of meat and drink. The village Green was filled with stalls and booths, itinerant shows, and amusements of all kinds. There were mountebanks and quack doctors, hawkers as voluble as Autolycus, and with as varied a pack, tumblers, rope-walkers, dancing

bears, and every kind of novelty to entertain the villagers and their guests, and win from them large contributions from their savings of the year. Visitors came for miles round, relations, friends, and others, merely on pleasure bent. There was open house right through the village; and it was remarked that there had never been so gay a feast. It is not improbable that, instead of the incident of the murder of Ziletto keeping people away, many came to Eyam for the first time, attracted by a morbid curiosity to see the place where the Italian had been killed outside My Lady's Bower, and to catch a glimpse, perhaps, of Mary Talbot, who called herself his widow, and of others who had figured in the trial of Reuben Clegg, whose escape from the prison stronghold was not the least remarkable chapter in this romance of the mountain village.

Except that Sir George and his daughter, while they did not quit the village during the Wake, took no part in the festival, the event was not shorn of a particle of its gayety by the tragedy of the Well-dressing. Moreover, Lady Stafford-Bradshaw and her husband (with a score of guests in their train) had returned from foreign parts to take up their permanent abode at the Old Hall.

The weather was lovely. There had been an abundant harvest. And hardly a single guest left the village until the end of the week, which was made more than ever notable by the Stafford-Bradshaws opening the Old Hall grounds

to all comers, first having, in an adjacent meadow, an ox roasted whole and tables and benches set out, with bread and beer enough to feast as many as cared to partake of the rough but honest fare. In the twilight, lamps and lanterns were lighted on the lawn, and there was dancing until ten o'clock, Lady Stafford herself and all her guests joining in the festivity, which is recorded to this day as the last time that the music of song and dance was heard within the precincts of the Old Hall grounds; and the tramps and mountebanks, the showmen and peddlers, had barely cleared out of the village on the Monday, and the miners in the Winship, the weavers in the village, the housekeepers and farmers once more returned to their ordinary labors, looking forward to their next merry-making, ere the cloud of a new calamity overshadowed the tragedy of My Lady's Bower, as Froggatt's Edge might, by comparison, blot out a mole-hill; so dire was it, so overwhelming, and yet so full of heroic inspiration, that imagination stands confounded at its unparalleled martyrdom.

It was on the last day of the Wake that Vicars received a parcel of costumes and finery from London that delighted his heart. It would have given him a keener pleasure if the treasures had not come through the medium of the murdered Italian. Ziletto, as we know, had promised the artistic village tailor samples of the highest London fashions; and, although it was more especially to present Mary Talbot with certain

articles of dress and personal decoration that he had sent his man to London, with special instructions and provided with ample funds for this purpose, Pedro was to have returned in time for the Well-dressing in May; but this was only known to master and man, and while the first was dead before the springs of Eyam had been denuded of their brave tributes of art, the second was still absent, though it was now late August, and the feast the people had talked so much about to Ziletto had come, with its fun and frolic, its merry-making, its happy meetings of old friends, and its joyous renewals of family ties and old associations.

The valet's absence had been accounted for—in most minds—by the man's sacrilegious impersonation of the priest, Castelli, in the union of the hands of Mary Talbot and Giovanni Ziletto; and the authorities had endeavored to discover the hiding-place of the absconding ally of the dead man. So far as their investigations were concerned, it seemed as if from the moment Pedro had disappeared over the white road leading southward, he had become invisible; but it was not easy to follow the comings and goings of men in those days, much less to bring to book delinquents who had fled from the scenes of their villainies, and the mysterious attendant of Ziletto was almost forgotten, when Vicars received from him a letter written in bad English, accompanying a packing case of clothing, in which there was a box directed to Miss Mary Talbot.

The letter signified that the writer's master

Signor Giovanni Ziletto, had advised him that in case of delay in procuring the articles for which he had been ordered post-haste to town, he should send them direct to Signor Vicars, who would deliver unto Signorina Talbot the box therein inclosed. It was his orders that in the event of these goods not being sent to Eyam in time for the dressing of the Wells, it might be that his good master, Signor Ziletto, might have left Eyam, as it was his intention to do soon after the dressing of the Wells, and in that case he could not have the pleasure to present these mementos himself to Signor Vicars and Signorina Talbot; they should, therefore, be dispatched in this wise. And whereas he (Pedro Bellini, the signor's devoted servant), having been sick by the way and meeting with other delays, the brocades and ribbons, the stomacher and gloves, desired for Signorina Talbot, had been most difficult to purchase, whereby the goods had been dispatched at this late period; on account of which he had deemed this explanation and apology fitting to the unfortunate occasion of so great a postponement, and which he hoped would be duly accounted in the signorina's regard for the word of his most generous master and good friend. The letter was written in a fair and flowing hand, and signed "Pedro Bellini."

Vicars unpacked the costumes with an avidity that was not checked by recollection of the tragedy with which they were associated. It was in no mercenary spirit that he gloated over

the braided jerkins, the silken hose and breeches, the lace ruffles, the gorgeous waistcoats and brocaded baldricks and other articles of superb tailoring, but it was the artist within him that was stirred; all through the Hundred there was not another costumer so eminent in his art as Vicars.

He was a widower, and had for lodgers one James Cooper, a miner, and his wife; his household being managed by a servant named Eliza Booth, who had nursed his wife in her last illness. Cooper was enjoying the closing festivities of the Wake; but Mrs. Cooper and Eliza Booth responded to the call of Vicars, and were intrusted with the care of the fine bale of goods and the box addressed to Miss Talbot until his return. He was going to the Manor House, he said, and he begged that they would keep the shop locked until his return. He was anxious that no one should see the wonderful things until he could arrange them in order and exhibit them, first to his most important patrons. Mrs. Cooper found some of the clothes rather damp, and suggested that Eliza Booth should put fresh logs upon the fire and place some of the articles upon a clothes-horse in the firelight, to which Vicars made no objection, as he made haste to the Manor House to show Sir George the letter he had received, and to consult him touching the box that was addressed to his daughter.

"I'd have thee destroy the box and its contents, whatever they may be," said Sir George. "This letter is but a further proof of the man's infamy. It was, thou seest, his intention to

leave Eyam immediately after the Well-dressing. My daughter, in her innocence, would no doubt have us believe that she would have accompanied him to his home in Italy; but between you and me, Master Vicars, he meant to abscond."

"And yet," said Vicars, "this letter goes far to relieve his man of the suspicion that he was the knave who donned the priestly robes and assumed the character of Father Castelli."

"'Tis so, indeed; for in that event he would hardly have had the audacity to send a letter to thee and give an address. But what is this? Here is an attachment to the rogue's screed;" and Sir George unfolded what seemed like a postscript, but written in another hand and fastened within the folding of the letter (a bulky document fastened with a ribbon and sealed with a heavy seal) which Vicars had read to Sir George and then handed to him.

"Great heavens!" said Sir George, perusing the brief note, "the man is dead!"

"Dead!" said Vicars.

" 'This is to certify,' " continued Sir George, reading the document, " 'that he who hath writ the letter of advice and explanation within to Master Jacob Vicars, of Eyam, in the county of Derby, namely, Pedro Bellini, a foreigner, died of the prevailing epidemic on the 29th day of June, in the parish of Cripplegate; and we, being his agents for the dispatch of the said goodes (having examined his affaires, to the best of our poore opportunities), have forwarded the same, with the letter aforementioned, and beg to

endorse the deceased Pedro Bellini's explanation of delay; and, with our deep regrets and condolences, beg to remain, your obedient servantes, —John Hayward Brothers and Company, Easte Cheape.'

"Pedro Bellini—half Spanish, half Italian," said Sir George, refolding the letter; "and Signor Roubillac said the fellow was a Frenchman!"

"Poor man!" said Vicars. "Whatever his nation, he soon followed his master. 'Twas a faithful servant; we must surely acquit him of the crime of vile impersonation."

"Perhaps," said Sir George, as if not thinking of Vicars' remark or his own reply. "The prevailing sickness; that means the plague, Vicars. I thought the scourge had come to an end; the man Ziletto spoke of it as so far diminished when he arrived in Eyam, I recall, that he said the people were returning to their homes and houses of business, and furthermore, that the court was about to remove from Hampton to London. Lady Stafford and the Bradshaws lived abroad during the pestilence. Pray God there be no contamination in thy goods, Vicars!"

"Contamination!" said Vicars. "They be new, fresh from the loom and the needle. Contamination! Nay, Sir George, that were impossible; and if they had even been clothes the dead had worn, surely such a journey, by road and water, would purify them."

"Maybe, maybe," said Sir George; "but I would advise thee to take counsel with Mistress

Dobbs, and subject thy treasures, as thou callest them, to such disinfection as may give assurance of their sweetness. There are such unguents and spices, herbs and other antidotes, that, being burned and the smoke thereof penetrating tapestries and fabrics, linens and clothes of all kinds, will destroy any lurking poison of the air that might be contamination if neglected. 'Tis a terrible scourge, the plague, Master Vicars. In the bills of mortality that same parish of Cripple-gate hath been seriously afflicted."

"But these goods do come from East Cheap, Sir George; and as I have said, they are new; they shine with gilt and silver braidings; they are silks and satins richly brocaded; new, Sir George; never been worn; fit for a prince's fancy, and as sweet as the smell of a hayfield."

When Vicars returned to his house and unlocked his little shop, his servant and Mrs. Cooper told him that two of the jerkins were as damp as the new-mown grass. They heaped up the logs on a brisk fire, and Vicars burned brimstone and some curious essences that Mrs. Dobbs had given him, though he was actuated more by a desire to dry the clothing than to purify it, so completely did he set aside what he regarded as Sir George's old-womanish notions of the possible need of purification.

Yet, even as he swung the kind of censer Mrs. Dobbs had given him for distributing about the room the vapor of her decoction of herbs, he was seized with a sudden sickness, as also was Eliza Booth; and before the night was over Mrs.

Cooper had also been carried to bed. There was no regular practitioner of medicine in Eyam. The barber was an adept at blood-letting. There was many local remedies for the various ills of the parish, and the rector and his wife were generally looked to for material and medical assistance. There was the customary bone-setter, too; and from time immemorial the village had not appeared to need any other assistance, except the midwife, who brought them into the world, and the grave-digger, who put them into their everlasting beds. The "quality" of the district occasionally obtained advice from the faculty in the nearest large town, and the ducal and lordly owners of the palaces of the Peak mostly kept a doctor among their retainers. The only resource of Vicars and his fellow sufferers lay in the remedies of Mrs. Mompesson, the prayers of her husband, and the varied advice of the village at large; but within three days there appeared upon the breast of their first patient a round purple mark, and he died. He was scarcely buried when the fatal sign appeared upon the person of Eliza Booth. She died the same day; followed, almost immediately, by the death of Mrs. Cooper.

All unconscious of any evil against the village, his selfish passion only contemplating the fall of Mary Talbot, Giovanni Ziletto even in the grave had smitten Eyam with death in its most hateful form. The virus had come from London in his lavish gifts of finery, and his messenger had started it on its way with his dying hands. It was the plague.

## CHAPTER THIRTY-EIGHT

## A GRIM FIRESIDE

ONE night, when a whispering group of villagers were sitting before the fire in the house-place of the Crown and Anchor, trying by companionship to give each other courage, there suddenly appeared in their midst the form and figure of Reuben Clegg. It was as if he had come through the wall. No one had heard him come through the door, no one had seen him enter the room. They were too much engaged when he lifted the latch to take note of anything beyond their own fears. Their ranks were being gradually thinned by an enemy there was no grappling with.

The rector had failed to persuade his wife to seek shelter among friends beyond the grim pale of infection. She was delicate, and the least attack might easily break her down. She would not leave her husband; but submitted to the children being sent away to friends in Yorkshire. Mompesson himself worked from morning till night, day by day, among the sick. He was seconded by his colleague, the inhibited Stanley. They gave the people both medicinal and spiritual relief. Sir George Talbot was foremost in providing necessities for all whom he had time to visit. Mary Talbot went about with the bur-

den of maternity. Vicars and the chief carpenter of the village were both dead. The constable had lost his daughter. Mrs. Clegg seemed to live a charmed life, facing every danger with the faith of pure religion and the patience of a saint. God had saved her son, though she had never seen him since the day when the law condemned him to a cruel death, and He would preserve her as long as He had work for her to do.

It was late in November. The trees were bare. A few ragged rooks were calling to each other in protest against the rain. Mompesson had prayed for the purifying, driving wind of heaven. Instead, there hung over the doomed village a pall-like cloud. Reuben Clegg, gaunt of limb, with eyes sunk deep and beard unkempt, had made his way from his last hiding-place conscious of some disaster happening to those he loved, though ignorant of the nature of the trouble. It might well be that he would have no news of it, living, as he had done, from hand to mouth, avoiding towns and villages except at night time. Continually in expectation of arrest he was determined never to be taken alive. Outcast of God and man, in revolt against his Maker, defiant of heaven and earth, a victim, as he felt, of both, there was still the love of a son burning in his heart for that dear gray little woman in her cottage above the glen where that mysterious hand had reached out of the darkness to slay Ziletto. He also continued to nurture an undying affection for the woman who had chosen the man that betrayed her rather than himself, who would

have been her willing slave and laid down his life freely to save her an aching finger.

They were counting up the dead, this little group of men sitting over the November fire, and it was one Marshall Howe who named them, for he had buried most of them, the regular gravedigger having succumbed to the disease; and they shuddered as he enumerated them: Jacob Vicars, Edward Cooper, Thomas Thorpe, Sarah Sydall, Mary Thorpe, Matthew Bands, Elizabeth Thorpe, Margaret Bands, Mary Thorpe, Margaret Bands, Elizabeth Thorpe, Richard Sydall, William Torre, Sythe Torre, Alice Torre, William Torre, John Sydall, Ellen Sydall, Martha Bands, Jonathan Ragge, Thomas Thorpe, Alice Sydall, John Stubbs, Hugh Stubbs, Ann Stubbs, Jonathan Cooper, Humphrey Hawksworth, and so on, the pathos of the list lying in the repetition of names, that indicated the sweeping away of entire families.

"Fill your glasses, men," said Marshall Howe, folding up his list of the dead; "'tis being down-hearted makes you sweat with fear; 'tis best to sweat with drink. Come, Radford, hi there! 'Tis my turn. Let us have another gallon of thy posset, man, and cheer thee!"

With all his well-acted geniality, Marshall Howe was hardly the man to cheer the company. He smelled of death. It might well have seemed that he carried the plague about in his clothes, for he buried folk straightaway in their own, himself acting as undertaker and sexton. It was thought that a man recovering from an

attack of the epidemic had immunity from further danger. Marshall Howe had fought the enemy and conquered, and he feared it no more.

"Get thee about thy business, Marshall," said Radford; "we do not like thy office; take thy whack of drink, and get thee gone. Thou art too noisy for us; and 'tis like blood-money, the fees thou art taking, to say nowt about the clothes and goods of what thou callest thy clients."

"Ha! ha! ha!" shouted Marshall, a giant of a man, with great hands and a broad dumpy face, thick heavy lips and limbs like unto a deformed Hercules. "Come on, then. Gi'e me my mug, and fill it to the brim; as hot as blazes!"

And every man thought he alone saw Reuben Clegg standing by all the time, for they reckoned he was a ghost; but when Marshall Howe had scorched his capacious throat with the burning liquor and had passed out into the muggy night, Reuben said:

"Neighbors, old friends, give me a drink—not out of his mug—I am starving; and tell me what has happened in the village."

It was Longstaffe who rose up and took the speaker's hand, but Radford who spoke, saying, "Dammit, Reuben lad, I'm blamed if I didna' think it was thy ghost! Welcome, lad, welcome!" And he filled him a mug of ale posset, with a dried apple on the top, and called to his wife to bring the chine of beef and put it on the table; for Radford, from the first, had argued that the best antidote to the plague was beef and beer; and when Mrs. Radford entered the room,

she too shook hands with Clegg, and said he had come to the City of Destruction, but life was a poor business at best, and 'twould be better to die among friends than perish of hunger flying from an unjust law.

"Amen! Amen!" said the half dozen villagers, in the loudest tones they had spoken for days, "Amen!"

"Thank you, Mrs. Radford," said Reuben, sitting down to his meat and eating ravenously. When he had somewhat appeased his appetite, he asked again what had come over the village.

They answered that it was the plague; and they spoke it as if it was a cry, and the very walls seemed to echo it. "The plague! the plague!"

Reuben shuddered, for he had read of the scourge in his books of Eastern travel, and he knew that there was no fighting this enemy with swords and pistols, nor combating it with prayer; for the latter remedy had ever been tried unavailingly—at least, so he reckoned.

"The plague!" he said, his face blanching in spite of the warmth of his beaker of hot ale. "The plague! And was it a list of the dead that yonder giant, who has just left, was counting up?"

"Ay, more's the pity," said Radford.

"And my mother?"

"Thy mother," said Mrs. Radford, "is God's angel; she walks in the pestilence unscathed."

"The dear old soul!" he exclaimed. "And the widow Ziletto—Sir George's daughter?"

“Turn thy steps toward the Manor House, and thou shalt hear her bairn cry and moan that ’tis born into such a pitiful world,” said Mrs. Radford. “ ’Tis a day old, come eight o’ the clock.”

Reuben did not reply to this, but asked for tobacco and sat him down with the rest, and said never a word until Longstaffe rose to say good-night; and even then not a man ventured to ask Clegg how he had come there, and if he were not afeared of thus exposing himself to discovery, when in walked one of the most dejected figures to be seen in all the village, Constable Dakin.

Mrs. Radford had lighted no candles, and the villagers preferred to sit in the ingle-nook, lighted only by the burning logs. It was a rare thing in the cottages to have any other light, except for the reading of a chapter in the Bible last thing.

“I’ve come to say good-by, neighbors,” said the constable, in a sepulchral voice.

“Nay, you’n said that too often, Dakin; we’n tired of it.”

“It’s the last time, friend Longstaffe. I’m mortal sick this night, I tell thee—mortal sick; took as my daughter was.—God rest her!—I shall be a subject for Marshall Howe i’ the morning, mek no doubt of it; and so I come to say Good-night.” Then there rose up in the firelight the gaunt figure of Reuben Clegg. The men in the ingle-nook made way for him, that he might face his enemy, and the constable stepped back a pace or two, not knowing what manner of man this might be who seemed to rise out of the shadow and dominate the room.

"Thou wert always a liar, Humphrey Dakin, but this time, it may be, thou speakest the truth—so Good-night to thee and Good-by. Trust me, I will lend a hand at thy burial!"

"Reuben Clegg!" gasped Dakin, clutching the arm of the settle, where the other men had risen from their seats. "I've dreamt o' thee ivvery night since they took thee out to hang thee. Is it thee, i' the flesh?"

"Ay, I'm Reuben Clegg, thin and spare enough to be Reuben Clegg's shadow; but I'm the man thou lied almost into his grave, thou blister of humanity, thou—"

"Nay," said the constable, feebly stretching out a protesting hand, "nay, donnat curse me. Let me a-be. I shanna' trouble thee long, and, warrant or no warrant, I lay no more hands on thee. It was my hatred o' thee, fear likewise, that made me want thee out o' the road. Canst forgive me?"

"Forgive thee! No, not if it would ease thee o' the torments of the hell thou believ'st in, wi' all its burning brimstone, thou perjured villain! Get thee forth, and die!"

The constable fell prone before his enemy, as if he had been struck a murderous blow. Several hands went to his assistance, and lifted him into the corner seat of the settle, and Longstaffe rebuked Clegg roundly.

"'Twas thy overbearing temper and thy pride that was thy ruin, Reuben Clegg. It was fairly said on the part o' the constable; he as good as confessed his wrong to thee, and asked thy for-

giveness humbly—'twas only a Christian thing to have said him nay civilly, without curses and words bitter as gall and murderous as a knife. Think better of it, Reuben."

"You talk of civility that have never felt the rack; you talk of forgiveness that have never felt the sting of the brand of Cain, conscious all the time of your own innocence. Think that over, Master Longstaffe; there is a lesson in it. I bear thee no malice, lad, nor Radford, nor any of you: I've often remembered you kindly; but none of you have suffered as I have." And he strode forth to the door, and no one stayed him.

As he lifted the latch he turned, and, directing his voice to the corner where Dakin was reviving from the shock of his attack, he said:

"Good-night, owd 'Wait a bit'; donnat wait any longer; keep thy word for once.—Good-night, Judas!"

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## CHAPTER THIRTY-NINE

### "A TALE OF SORROWS INDESCRIBABLE"

AND the next day the constable gave up the ghost, and was buried in his clothes. There was no longer any man to make coffins.

Reuben Clegg went home to his mother, and no one attempted to take him; neither did any one think of giving him up. It was known through the Hundred, and beyond, that Eyam was smitten with the plague, and it might well be considered a place where the king's warrants

no longer ran. Moreover, Sir George held out hopes of pardon to him. The petition in his favor was signed by the best men and women in the county, and the confession of the constable, as reported by Longstaffe and Radford and sworn to already, would go far to influence the king's advisers.

Before the end of the month of November, Mary Talbot, otherwise Signora Ziletto, was seen sitting at the Manor House window, with her baby on her knee, like a picture, some said, of the Madonna and Child; and she said she was glad that Reuben Clegg had given himself up to nursing the sick and burying the dead.

It was wonderful how persistently Clegg worked. He never seemed to take an hour's rest. Mr. Stanley, at first, was inclined to repudiate his co-operation; and Mr. Mompesson felt it incumbent upon him to warn Clegg not to influence the religious faith of the sufferers with whom he came in contact.

"I'll not interfere with their hopes of a future life, rector," said Clegg, "nor say aught against prayer; but what think you, yourself, about the efficacy of prayer? You've done enough in that way to save the whole parish, every man jack; but the purple sign of death comes out upon their poor flesh all the same: they die, and are buried."

"I cannot argue with you, Clegg; 'tis impious," said Mompesson; but the rector redoubled his exertions for the physical welfare of his people, and Clegg, by his energy and his cheerful encouragement, snatched many a victim from

the grave, and comforted many another with his possets, his hot spices, and his pleasant words. No one thought of him for a moment as an escaped felon. His mother saw in his escape the Divine interposition, and tried to bring Reuben to this way of thinking. He would listen to her patiently, nor reply when she asked him who but God had saved her in the midst of the pestilence to welcome him back to their cottage, who but God had brought him through the infamous bars that had holden him, who but God had protected him in the wilderness and brought him home?

Only once had Reuben ventured to ask who had allowed him to be falsely accused, who had permitted his good name to be sullied, who had suffered his life to be blighted, and given the lamb a prey to the wolf? His mother had replied with texts, and wise sayings regarding God's righteous punishments and the mystery of His divine ways. And Reuben marveled at his mother's happiness and her exemption from the infection of the plague; for she went among the people with never an ache or fear, untiring, closing the eyes of the dying with such cheerful promises of a heavenly paradise beyond the grave that robbed Death of half his terrors, and lighted for many a heart a lamp of Hope that showed them the sunny stairway to the white streets of the New Jerusalem.

With winter, the villagers hoped the pestilence would cease. It had been so, hitherto, in the history of the plague in other lands; but Eyam

was doomed. The grim Angel of Death never stayed his hand. On Christmas Day, the blinds were pulled down at the Manor House. Reuben Clegg's heart stopped beating for a moment, as he walked up to the familiar door and asked for Mrs. Dobbs. Death had been there; but not in the shape of the plague. Signora Ziletto's baby had died in the night. The mother was bearing her trouble bravely, Mrs. Dobbs said. They had never expected to rear the child, and 'twas to her thinking a happy release. Reuben turned away, and bent his steps to the rectory, where he found Mrs. Mompesson busy in her husband's study, which was now something like an apothecary's shop. She was mixing decoctions that had been found of service, though she looked far more in need of physic and broth than any of the pining villagers.

Mompesson and Stanley gave themselves no rest; they worked together like brothers, praying with the dying, reading the last words of the Prayer Book over the dead, and encouraging the living. If Mompesson could only have induced his wife to join the children, at their friend's in Yorkshire, his heart would have been lightened; but she would not leave him.

With the New Year, the rector's wife had a companion in her labors. Mary Talbot, otherwise Signora Ziletto, freed from the nursing of her child, flung herself into the work of tending the sick and administering to the dying. Neither her mental nor her physical suffering had impaired her beauty. The robust figure, the rosy

complexion, the elastic step, were no longer there; but in their place a refinement of form, a tender grace of manner, a delicate pallor that gave an almost ascetic character to her beauty, such as painters strive to achieve in their pictures of angelic figures and virgins that have become angels of God.

As the spring began to pass into summer, the plague became general throughout the village. It raged. There was death in every breath of air. The birds sang, the flowers bloomed, the blossom appeared on the trees, the hay-fields grew ready for the reaper, but the only mower was Death, and he cut down the living with a steady sweep of his scythe. All business else was stopped. Nobody worked. The cows remained unmilked, the sheep unshepherded; the Winship Mine was closed, the looms ceased to make music in the cottages, the dead were buried ere the stricken limbs were cold. Graves were dug anywhere. In a house, a little way beyond the village, one solitary woman had, herself, buried every member of her family with her own hands; while a neighbor had made his own grave, and, strewing the bed of it with straw, had lain him down and died in it.

It was the last day of May, and out of a population of three hundred and fifty souls seventy-seven had perished. Of these were whole families, and scarce a soul that had not been visited by Clegg, though such was the terrible nature of the disease that in the last moments it was too loathsome for even children to tolerate their par-

ents, or for parents to embrace their dying innocents. June found the village in the highest state of panic, the living, as if by a general impulse, resolving to fly from the place. It was at this juncture that the heroism of Mompesson and Stanley fired the fainting hearts of their flocks. At a special service of the Church, in which the two ministers called the whole village together, of every creed and opinion, the rector remonstrated with the people against the idea of flight. Already many of them were infected, if not in their persons, in their clothes; moreover, they owed a duty to their fellow-creatures beyond the borders of the village. To carry the disease out into the world at large would be a crime. If they were to die, let them stand by each other and die together; not poison the breath of the healthful and the happy, who would fall cursing them as the authors of their misery. Should they consent to remain with him and his brother Stanley, his wife and Sir George Talbot and his daughter, and the rest of their hopeful and God-fearing neighbors, he would ask the Duke of Devonshire and other residents beyond the village, to send them relief of food and raiment, of medicines and every possible physical aid; and he was assured of the result of his appeal. They would thereupon draw a cordon around the village, and there should be sentinels at fixed and convenient points, so that no one should pass out or in; and there should be selected spots where all that was needful should be passed within the cordon, and sanitary methods formed for disburs-

ing such money as might be needed for payment. They would thus save the other villages of the Hundred, and the great world beyond, from infection, and snatch from premature death thousands of their fellow-countrymen. And their reward should be great on earth, as in heaven. Their names should go down to posterity on an everlasting scroll of fame, and when their time should come, their souls, ascending to heaven, should be welcomed with angelic songs, and Christ, sitting on the right hand of the Father, should say unto each man and woman, and every child, "Well done, thou good and faithful servant; enter thou into the kingdom of God."

And all the people said, "Amen!" and many fell into each others' arms and wept.

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## CHAPTER FORTY

"IF HE SLAY ME, YET WILL I TRUST HIM"

THE first time Reuben Clegg met Mary Talbot face to face after his return was at the height of the terror that was devastating the village. It was in the twilight of a lovely June evening. Clegg had walked from his mother's cottage, on his way to visit Radford and his wife, both of whom were sick. The long village street was still as the grave. Not a door was open. The roadway was green with weeds and grasses. Wild flowers decorated the footpaths by the roadside hedge and the walled-in gardens. It

might have been a village of the dead. If on any day the people were stirring, they moved about like ghosts, or they were bringing out their dead. No grim signs of black flags or outward marks on door-posts signaled the infected houses. It was as if the entire street was sicklied o'er with some fatal legend of death. On this summer evening not a soul was abroad. Nor was there, anywhere, the cheerful or solemn augury of a light in any window.

Away on the side of the distant hill, where the Old Hall had been wont to show its illuminated windows, only the shadowy outlines of the place could be seen. The Stafford-Bradshaws had left the village in the very first week of the distemper. They and their friends, and their servants, and the stranger within their gates, had fled before the pestilence, never to return; and while the humble cottage of Vicars, where they unpacked Ziletto's fatal gift, still stands, to bear historic witness of the truth of the Martyrdom of Eyam, with other relics that need no monuments to keep the story living, the Old Hall is a heap of ruin and forgetfulness.

The village forge no longer blazed upon the hillock, and even the birds were silent. Nothing lived, as it seemed to Clegg, by any token that appeared, except a few weird bats that mocked the flight of the absent swallows; for those guests of summer had, strange to say, deserted their favorite haunts in the village, as if the air no longer commended itself, nor "smelled woingly," as it was accustomed, where Banquo

noted its characteristics to Duncan as they entered Macbeth's castle. There was not a single sign of health or mirth, or even peace, for the very silence was threatening. If a whisper stirred, it might have been the passing of some immortal soul to its long account. And when Clegg observed a figure coming toward him from the direction of the rectory, he was conscious of a strange sense of amazement. It was a hooded figure, and it came down the road as if it glided over the grass, and brushed the wayside flowers with its trailing garments. Coming to where Clegg had paused, it pushed back its hood, and lo, it was Mary Talbot! She crossed his path where the village street branches off to the glen whence he had carried her home on that fatal night by My Lady's Bower.

"I am glad to see you again, Master Clegg," she said, putting out her hand, "if one may say one is glad at anything in these untoward days."

He took her hand with a trembling grasp, and held it for a little while, as he answered with suppressed emotion.

"Thank you, madam."

He would have said Madam Ziletto, but the name of the dead man stuck in his throat; and despite the deadly atmosphere of the village and all its woes, his heart beat fast with the emotion of the bygone days when his love for the woman was beyond words.

"You have often been in my thoughts, and it nigh broke my heart when they condemned you. God and I knew that you were innocent."

"Thank you, Miss Talbot," he said, for the old days came back to him, before the shadow of Ziletto fell upon Eyam. "I hope your father is well."

It was a very commonplace remark, but he thought of nothing else to say.

"Yes; he does not complain. He would like to see you at the Manor House; will you not come, dear friend?"

"Nay; I fear it would be wrong to enter a non-infected house."

"We believe in the Divine Mercy, and that, for some wise purpose, God has made a sign upon the lintel of our doorway; peradventure, that we are chosen to be useful to the stricken, we seem to have been miraculously spared."

"I will come," said Reuben; "it will be a comfort to meet folk who do not think me a murderer."

"It will help my father, and give us all fresh courage, to see you once more beneath our roof," she answered.

He made no reply, but only looked at her wonderingly and tried to keep back his tears, the first he had shed so long as he could remember. And she passed on her way, leaving him standing in the road.

They met again on the next day, at the rectory, in consultation with Mr. and Mrs. Mompeyson, Mr. Stanley, and Sir George Talbot; Mary Talbot, not the least self-possessed of any of them, accepting the humblest and most trying work that could be allotted to her, Sir George permitting her to run any and every risk that

she courted. Inspired by the example and precepts of Mompesson, Sir George had no fear. He opposed the plague with the sword of duty. He felt that he was the chief of the village, and that no harm could come to the captain, any more than Mompesson or Stanley could be smitten while they were engaged in the absolutely necessary work of their profession. He surprised Clegg with his faith, and Mary Talbot awed him with her strange angelic beauty.

The "cordon sanitaire" had been religiously maintained. At the place where in ancient days there had been an outer gate of the village, men and women took their turn to stand sentry over the valley; and food was brought to certain points of the imaginary wall, that had for landmarks certain crags and rocks and water-ways.

It was now resolved to close the church and hold the services in the open air. Reuben Clegg commended this precaution; however much they prayed, whatever their faith, it was well to avoid bringing the people together in a confined atmosphere. Both Mr. Mompesson and Mr. Stanley noted without comment the overt cynicism of Clegg's remark; but Mary Talbot looked at him with beseeching eyes, and when he went home that day he talked a long while with his mother about her faith. She told him the story of Peter's imprisonment and release, and how, when he appeared at the house of Mary, the mother of John, they thought it was his angel; and how Longstaffe had told her that when he, Reuben, entered Radford's house, each man

thought it was his ghost; and how she was not surprised, and knew him for himself when he walked through the meadow and up the little garden-path and took her into his arms. It was wonderful how quietly Reuben sat and listened to her. He could not deny that his escape had been little less than miraculous, considering that he had literally passed through the prison yard in presence of the sentries, who thought he was one of the officials or visitors. And was it not the hand of God, she asked, that, still holding him from arrest, had made him His agent among the stricken of the village? And did he not owe it to God to humble himself before His throne with a grateful heart?

That night Clegg knelt beside his mother in prayer, and said Amen to her simple petition; but deep down in his heart the motive of this complaisance was his love for Mary Talbot, and a desire to come nearer unto her in thought; for it seemed to him that she suffered for his hardness toward the Faith. Her look of appeal haunted him. It surely expressed more than a common interest in him. She had looked into his eyes with a meaning that was not a rebuke but an appeal, and an appeal that was sympathetic, almost tender. He could see her face in his mind as he walked homeward, and he found himself speaking aloud as he wandered out of his right path and climbed the higher edge of the table-land above his cottage. "Oh, God," he said, "if it might be!" and for the first time for years his heart was in the cry. It was no

mere exclamation; it was a prayer; but the next moment he shuddered at it, as if he had outraged the poor suffering souls in the village at his feet; as if his thoughts of love, the faintest dream of happiness, were an infamy, while on every hand his fellow villagers were passing into the Valley of the Shadow of Death.

Nevertheless, such is the overwhelming strength of human love, that he could not resist a tremor of hope, that gave him in the future the companionship of the only woman who had ever stirred his heart, and who, whatever she might do, would have an everlasting abiding-place there. Again, he repeated his supplication, "Oh, God, if it might be!"

As his voice pierced the still air, a star came out over Froggatt's Edge, and away as far as the eye could trace an outline of hills another lamp of God, another and another, appeared. Then it came into his mind to ask himself what he could do to be worthy of such an answer to his cry, as his saintly mother would ask for him, knowing his nature and his only ambition in life. And now a darkness fell upon his soul, and the stars, as he thought, disappeared. He was conscious that, if there was a God, he was trying to make a bargain with Him; this did not appear in his spoken words, but in his thoughts. If he could be assured of the realization of his desire, he would believe anything, be anything, accept any creed. It was as if Satan tempted him to a profanity that was devilish. He suddenly knew that his mother, at that moment, was

praying for him; and her sudden influence seemed to inspire his exclamations: "Get thee behind me, Satan!" and "Lord, forgive me, and count it to my ignorance that I am what I am!"

Presently the stars came out again, and he descended the hill and made his way to the cottage where the lamp of love and hope shone out against the whispering elms; and as it came in sight, he mingled with his desire to do something that might win Mary Talbot's approval a longing to be reconciled with Mompesson and Stanley, and to come within the pale of his mother's faith, and be as worthy of his narrow escape from an infamous death as he was innocent of the crime for which he had been condemned.

And as the days passed he gradually found a strange new comfort in his mother's example of fortitude, and in her perfect immunity from sickness. She vowed she had never been so strong in her life. He no longer wondered at her faith; he found it beautiful.

Whether it was, as Mrs. Clegg believed, that her son's conscious heart had been mercifully touched by the Holy Ghost, or whether it was the gentle influence of Mary Talbot and his yearning to be acceptable in her sight, it is hard to say; but from day to day he became more and more tolerant of prayer and supplication. He no longer debated with the two clergymen, and he had secretly found solace in prayer. He did not ask anything of God, but he volunteered vows of manliness, of humility, pledges of peni-

tence for faults of word or deed, and tendered, with humility, his gratitude that he had been permitted to live through his trouble and to come back home when he could be of use to his neighbors and by way of an answer to his mother's prayers. Then, for the first time he began to fear that he might be taken; and he spoke of his peril to Sir George. Strange as it may seem, the chief authorities knew nothing of Clegg's return to Eyam. The mountain village was entirely cut off from the world. It was a community apart. Lepers, on some remote island of the sea, could not have been more alone.

Death had not yet become so familiar, though it was present in almost every house, that the passing of the rector's wife, in her twenty-seventh year, did not send a thrill of anguish through many a breast. As his servants led the widowed husband away from the couch of death, he turned and sobbed, "Farewell! farewell! all happy days!" And William and Mary Howitt say there is nothing more pathetic in literature than the rector's letters to his children, George and Elizabeth, announcing to them the doleful news of the dear mother's death, which are to be found in Mr. William Wood's brief but most impressive "History of Eyam and the Great Plague."

With the death of Mrs. Mompesson all hope went out of the heart of the mountain village. Despair made itself heard. Hitherto the people had suffered in silence, now they cried to God

for mercy. Their voices were heard in the streets. The sufferers no longer endured their pain with courage, their moans were manifest in every house upon which Death had put his silent seal.

The messengers, who went out to the signal points for food, returned with sullen dejected faces. The persons of the outer world, whose duty it was to deposit the village rations, hurried away from the spot, scared and fearful. Everybody now looked for death. It was the month of August, 1666. The days of the annual Wake had returned. People remembered now how gay a time it had been the year previously; and there were those who saw in the plague a punishment for that past gayety. But Mompesson and Stanley both presented the terror from an entirely different view, finding in it still reason for patience, opening heaven to the dead, and bidding the living to be of good courage.

On Sunday the service was now held in a shaded glen, where Nature had provided a pulpit as if hewn from the rock, and which to this day is called Cucklet Church. Thither crept the attenuated flock, each man, woman and child standing and praying apart from the other; a gaunt, weird company, with Reuben Clegg and his mother among the rest, Mary Talbot and her father conspicuous for the fearless way in which they went among the people, and Mompesson preaching as one not only having authority, but the gift of divine eloquence.

But the plague marched on with relentless tread; and all day long the leaves of autumn fell upon fresh-made graves.

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## CHAPTER FORTY-ONE

### THE PASSING OF FRANCESCA

FRANCESCA ROUBILLAC was dying in Venice. She was once more at home in her husband's house by the Valiero Palace. Her faith bade her look for a happier home beyond; but her heart clung to the memory of the days when first she had learned to love the man who had won her by his great devotion.

It was at the setting of the sun. Her window was open to the sky. She could hear the songs of minstrels as they passed beneath, on their way to some great function of state or pleasure. She had confessed her sins and obtained absolution. They were sins easily forgiven by Heaven, though earthly judges might be more exacting. We judge too much from the wickedness of our own hearts in this world.

If Francesca Roubillac had sinned in thought, she had sinned in no other way. Tempted by Ziletto, she had struggled free from his strange hypnotic influence, and sought protection by the side of her husband. Whatever faults the Italian woman had, we have seen them. Many a saint lives in the calendar who was less deserv-

ing. She loved dress, it is true; that was less of a vanity in her days than ours, and in Italy it was the inspiration of art and beauty.

As Roubillac sat by her on this last evening of her sojourn on earth, he recalled that it was from the open window near which she was lying that he first saw her land from her gondola, one of the few girl students of the Valiero art school. He sat by her now with her white thin hand in his, and she was making a pathetic appeal to him.

"Nay, dearest, I am assured of myself; it is not alone our dear Father Lorenzo who promises me safe and quick passage through that half-way house where the soul is purified for its immortal inheritance, but I have seen the Mother of God in a vision, and I know I am redeemed. Oh, my dear Bernardo, let us not be parted when your time shall come. I love you, Bernardo, though there is blood upon your hands. Nay, do not turn your face from me; it was for love of me you fell; it was an earthly love, it defied God and the angels; as it has not parted us here below, let it not part us beyond the grave. Confess, Bernardo; confess, and live!"

He bent his head over her hand that he held in his, and hid his face from her.

"Bernardo," she continued, raising herself upon her pillow to place her disengaged hand upon his head, "I know how much you suffer; God knows it was all for love of me. The Blessed Virgin knows, and she is kind to men who stake their all, in this world and the next,

for the love of a woman, as you have done, Bernardo—as you have done!”

“Nay; peace!” he replied, not daring to look up. “I know not what you mean.”

“Ah, yes, you do,” said the sweet voice of the woman. “And I know. But confess it not to me, Bernardo; not to me, but to the good Father Lorenzo; he will intercede for you, and I shall have gone before to prepare the way. Promise me that when I am called you will relieve your soul of its load of sin.”

“But I will not have you gone,” he said, lifting his dry eyes toward her, his face drawn with agony, his lips quivering. “I will not have you gone!”

Then, turning to the Calvary that hung upon the wall, he looked toward it, exclaiming, “O merciful God, spare her to me! Spare her to the world, that hath need of her! Spare her to Art, to Love! Our lives are so short, spare her one year more only, if it be Thy will; but take her not from me! I will atone, in the dedication of the remainder of my days to the glorification of Thy church, to the adornment of Thy holy altars!”

“Nay, wilt thou not first confess, Bernardo?”

“Burden not thy thoughts with my poor soul, Francesca. Let us talk of our happiness, and pray to the Virgin to extend thy sojourn here. Dost thou remember when first thou didst confess thy love to me?”

“God is merciful, and will forgive thee thy

sins though they were black as the tablets of thine enemy," she said, not heeding his reminiscence of their happiness.

"'Tis not merciful to take thee from me, Francesca; it were merciful to let thee stay, now that the fiend is no longer permitted to darken our path. Oh, Francesca, lift up thy prayer to this end!"

"I would have thee atone, Bernardo," she went on, as if she had not heard him; "but first cometh confession and dedication of work."

"Francesca," he said, looking up into her saintly face, "thou art not listening to me."

"Heaven shall listen, dear; the Mother of God is listening to thee even now, and I will kneel at her feet and never rise until I win her dear intercession for thee. When thou shalt dedicate thyself afresh to her service and to God Himself, the work thou hast already done will not be forgotten."

And now she was bending her face toward him, and pausing for his reply. He was kneeling by her side. She had risen upon her pillows, angelic-like in her pose, her pallid face lighted with the evening sunshine and radiant by reason of the glory that was in her eyes. It might have been the angel of the Ascension, as he had painted her on the altar in the church of San Stefano; and yet he struggled with himself against the certainty that she was about to leave him.

"All the good that I have done, all that my poor weak soul was capable of, I owe to thy sweet and holy inspiration! And yet they in-

vite thee hence, when, O my God, I most need thee; when my soul yearns to do the thing thou wouldst have me do, and it will lack the impulse of thy guiding hand."

"If to me thou owest the good thou hast done, Bernardo, 'tis to me also thou owest thy ill. In forgiving me, in granting absolution to my soul, shall it not be taken into account for thee? Nay, Bernardo, be patient, be submissive; unburden thy soul, repent, do penance, prepare thyself to meet thy heavenly Judge, and make it possible that we may be united in that better world, to which thine art has pointed in many a radiant figure. Love is everlasting, Bernardo; our hearts shall find each other, whatever be our immortal fate; 'tis for thee, dear love, to cast the weight from thy feet and the burden from thy soul, that I may stretch out my hand to thee across the gulf, and we may kneel together before the throne of mercy and of grace."

Roubillac rose from his knees and sat by her on the bed. She laid her head upon his arm, her eyes riveted upon the sky, where the sun was dropping into the sea.

"Behold, I am called!" she said, and pointed with her outstretched arm. Roubillac turned his face to the open window. Beyond the wide lagoon he caught the glimmer of the purple Adriatic. Francesca saw further. It was a company of angels that beckoned her.

"Farewell, dear heart!" she said; "kiss me! Shall I not carry thy message of confession and repentance with me?"

He kissed her pale lips. A smile moved them; a bright light shone in her eyes.

"You promise me?" she whispered, turning to him for the last time.

"I promise," he replied, and a few minutes later he was kneeling by the bed of death. He thought he heard a strain of heavenly music in the air; but it was eventime, and Venice is full of music when spring walks with rosy feet upon her rippling waters.

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## CHAPTER FORTY-TWO

### THE CONFESSION OF ROUBILLAC

"To see her was to love her," said Roubillac to the priest, his friend and father confessor. "And I loved her with all my soul."

"To the sinful exclusion of thy God," said the priest. "But He is our Father, and hath sworn to forgive the truly penitent that shall confess and make atonement. Have no fear, my son; unburden thy soul, lay bare thy heart; 'twas her last dying request of thee."

"But let me recall those happy days, my father; they are fitting to thine ear; as thou knowest, 'tis a comfort to remember them. Even the fallen angels may have happy moments, recalling the heaven they have lost."

Lorenzo and Roubillac had been boys together. They were friends in their youth; and when Lorenzo became a priest and Roubillac a painter

they still were wont to talk of worldly things and great ambitions. Lorenzo knew of Roubillac's love for Francesca, and took part in the ceremony of their marriage. It was natural, therefore, that Roubillac should be familiar with his friend, though he wore the frock of the priesthood and spoke with more than an earthly authority.

"Proceed, Bernardo. I listen to thee as both friend and priest; I have a mortal man's sympathy for thee, for are we not all born in sin and shapen in iniquity?"

"I was not made to inspire a young girl's heart with the poetry of passion," continued the penitent, little heeding the priest's manful words of encouragement, only intent upon the promptings of his own impulse of revelation. He was happy in an egotistical fashion, recounting the triumphs of his love and the bliss of those early days of his courtship and marriage. "I was a gaunt, sad-eyed man, engrossed in an art I failed to master, lacking the inspiration that comes of love and its ennobling desires, its romance, its truth, its self-denial that springs from out its selfishness; for 'tis a selfish passion at the outset, but God sanctifies it, Ithuriel touches it with his spear. I found many ways to strew her path with tokens of my admiration. And one day, as thou knowest, I beguiled her to sit for my Angel of the Ascension. Thou knowest the altar well, that stands in the church of San Stefano, in Verona?"

"A most worthy work," said the priest.

"May it not count for a good deed in my record before Heaven?"

"Inasmuch as it had holy inspiration, so it will," said the priest. "So spiritual a work is a faithful use of one of the talents intrusted to thee."

"It was she who inspired it," said Roubillac, rising from the seat where he had been half-kneeling, half-sitting, before Father Lorenzo, who now and then laid an affectionate hand upon his lay friend's arm.

"Here is the face, the celestial upraised eyes that pierce the gloom," he continued, his own eyes fixed in imagination upon the picture. "She lived for me, an angel upon the earth; and now, dear God, she has unfolded her wings and taken flight."

"To intercede, it may be," said the priest, "to help lift thy soul to His recognition, to make thy passage sure through such purgatorial prelude as may haply purge thy soul."

"And so at last we were wed," said Roubillac, as if he had not heard the priest's remark, and once more sitting humbly on the low seat by the priest. "Yes, we were wed, she and I. And oh, the bliss of her companionship! She was the model in my art, the worshiped of my soul—"

"To the neglect of Holy Church, alas!"

"Nay, I devoted her and myself to Holy Church. Thou knowest I did; and whereof the church's altars, her chapels, her sanctuaries bear witness. It was friendship at first, pity perchance; but at last she loved me for my devotion

to her. There was not a wish of hers I did not gratify before it was half confessed. Nay, nay; 'twas not vanity nor selfishness, 'twas more fatherly than the lover; 'twas such as might become our Father which is in Heaven, since thou sayest He is love itself and giveth what is asked of Him."

"Attune thy thoughts, my son, with more of reverence," said the priest; but Roubillac was once more wholly occupied with the reminiscences of his short life—for he had never lived, he averred, until he had seen Francesca. "But, alas the day!" he went on, "one who called himself a student of our art, a traveler, a poet, a citizen of Florence, came to Venice; a very prince, they said who professed to know him, endowed with wealth of intellect and gold; his name, Giovanni Ziletto."

"I knew the man; 'tis in regard to him thou wouldst confess," said the priest; "and 'twas of him I promised thy saintly wife I would remind thee, not alone as thy friend and fellow-citizen, but as became mine office."

"'Tis well," said Roubillac, "I thank thee. She hath my promise to confess unto thee all that she believed was a burden to my soul, so heavy that it might be a barrier against our meeting again in heaven."

"And his name was Ziletto?" said the priest, anxious to keep the penitent close to his text.

"A pagan god, a thing of beauty without a heart, but with the devilish passion of a fiend!"

"Judge thou not!" said the priest. "God fashioned him."

"And if He did, why, then, 'twas in mockery of His saints, in mockery of His own dear Son; for He gave him a form and features that might have matched the noblest and sweetest. Picture the Angel Gabriel, and thou mightest have been content to see Ziletto in thy imagination. The ancients would have raised him aloft as Apollo. We Christian painters would have given him a Divine afflatus; and yet, great Heaven, he was a devil—an evil spirit, a man with everything but a heart. The blood of all my veins rushes to my own and stops its beating when I think of him."

Roubillac flung himself upon his knees, and buried his face in his hands and groaned. There was a long pause.

Presently the priest, kneeling by the side of the penitent, said, "Think of Christ's patience and His agony. All thy sufferings are as a summer breeze to the simoom compared with His; He shed tears of blood. Be calm, my son; dear friend, be calm."

"Thou hast said ere now, thou friend of my youth, Lorenzo, thou pastor and confessor of my age, 'Let thy soul be free, fling down thy thoughts before God, lay bare thy heart, quit thee of thy burden'; and so I will—and so I will!"

"The Mother of God help thee!" said the priest. "Our Heavenly Father, through the intermediary of His Gracious Son, be with thee!"

"This man, this fiend in human shape," con-

tinued Roubillac, now rising to his feet, "this man, that might have vied for beauty with the Angel Gabriel, this Satan smiled upon my wife; there was music in his voice, as there was on the forked tongue of the Serpent in Paradise; he told her of the glories of other lands, of courts, of pageants, and of such-like things. Only they can play upon a woman's heart who know the strings. Thou rememberest how I sought thy counsel?"

"Right well, my son; right well."

"She was a bird fluttering toward the piping of the decoy among the twigs of the limed roses and polyanders; but I rescued her. Thy friend of the English palace, Father Castelli, brought to thy knowledge the embassadorial messenger; it seemed like God's providence that I was at hand."

"It was the answer to my prayer. Sometimes God answers when we are peremptory, when we strive against Him; then we have our way, instead of urging 'Thy will be done.' And so He sent thee and thy wife to England."

"He sent us to an earthly paradise; but He sent the serpent also. A weary journey to a peaceful home; the color came back to her cheeks, but not till many days were spent. And then, as it had been in Venice, so 'twas in Eyam; when most we thought we were happy there fell upon our path the shadow of Ziletto, and he announced himself with unblushing front, and almost in Christ's own words, 'It is I, be not afraid!'"

The priest crossed himself. Roubillac leaned

against the frescoed wall of the priest's room, and the reflection of the back-waters of the great canal made a dancing glory on the ceiling. It was a humble dwelling place; yet it lacked none of the atmosphere of Art that filled the City in the Sea within and without her human abodes. Lorenzo would not have been the loving friend of Roubillac without showing a comrade's devotion; this had been manifested in the decoration of his rooms, in a corner by the Church of San Martino, and it was made further manifest by his taking the painter to his own home after the burial of Francesca. Roubillac had been literally led by the hand to the priest's house. Lorenzo had bid him come and stay until such time as he should be sufficiently recovered to take up his work again, and live for the adornment of the church where Francesca and her father had worshiped when she was a girl.

"But first confession," Roubillac had repeated; "first confession, then atonement. And I promised; it is registered in heaven." And when the priest encouraged him to this end Roubillac said surely the record was known in all its black detail, and why should he scorch the heart of his friend, why burn his story into another heart, to condemn the handiwork of God Himself? But these sayings were only tokens of remorse and promptings of the devil, so Lorenzo said, and confession was the only key to forgiveness; and a promise to the dead, was it not sacred? So it had come to pass that Roubillac knelt at the feet of the priest and made confession; but Lorenzo

had not in his pure soul, burdened though it was with many guilty secrets of human depravity, dreamed of anything so black as the guilt of his friend, Bernardo Roubillac.

"Rest thee, thou art faint," said the priest, as Roubillac staggered toward the couch that was the priest's bed, sheltered in an alcove of the room, and with a Cross of gold at the head that had been beaten out of some tawdry ornament of a mosque, from the East, where Venetian troops had flung down the Crescent, and brought rich spoil to the Adriatic, as witness to this day the relics of the valor of her youth.

"It wrings my heart to tell thee all; 'twill wring thine own. But perchance God knows what is best for the puppets of His hand, the creatures of His hate and love—"

"Nay, desist. Thou dost profane His holy name," said the priest.

"It had been well thou hadst not prayed for us, or, peradventure, with less of thy heart and soul in the appeal; then, perchance, had we never left Venice—"

"We know not, when we suffer, that 'tis for our good," the priest replied. He knelt by the side of his blaspheming friend, who had flung himself upon the couch and lay there, prone upon his face. "And every journey comes to an end at last, and every sin the human mind can think or the human hand commit may be forgiven to the truly penitent. Have courage, friend; there is joy in heaven over the repentant sinner, and to thy credit already the score stands

well; blot it not out. God so loved the world that he gave His only begotten Son for us, an atonement for our sins, that we might have everlasting life. Oh, Bernardo, what can I say to thee, dear friend of my youth, to lift thee out of the pit into which thy thoughts are falling? Arise, take up thy cross, and follow the Master."

"Thou art very good to me, Lorenzo; but why describe to thee the scorching of the plowshare over which I passed for weary days and nights a watch upon my wife, an eavesdropper, a spy? One day he came to me. 'Thou art jealous,' he said, 'and thou wrongest me; I am in love, but not where thou thinkest. Dost know the dainty morsel they call Mary Talbot in the village yonder? 'Tis she I love; and if you will aid me, I swear that if there be so much as a fancy, ever so slight, on thy wife's part in the way of love or friendship for me, I will make Francesca hate me.' I had nearly slain him where he stood; but it seemed that he had a sudden power over me, a power that was more than mortal, and I stood open-mouthed and listened to him. 'I will leave thee undisturbed, in thy Art and in thy love,' he said. It was a bargain with the devil, such as Faust might have made with Mephistopheles in the legend. I knew it; and could not choose but listen to him. 'What is it I may do to prove thee?' I asked. 'She is coy, this English maiden, and dare not acknowledge my love; the village would kill her; they hate us, who are foreigners.' I knew this was false; for

the people had been kind to us, and Sir George Talbot had even played the host to Ziletto; he had broken bread with him. And yet it sounded true; I had heard of a certain antagonism among the English to foreigners, and it was to me, as he spoke, a fact of my own experience. I was bewitched; it cannot be otherwise; he was a magician, a fiend, and I came to think he was my friend, that he desired to remove what he declared to be his unconscious spell from Francesca; and again I said, 'What is't I may do to prove thee?' 'I have sounded Father Castelli on a secret marriage,' he replied, 'to which she is not averse, but he will none of it; his position is delicate and difficult; they hate the True Faith now in England; any day he might be arrested; the Stafford-Bradshaws, who protect him in his office, run the risk of attainder. Bradshaw is a Presbyterian; it is his wife, Lady Stafford, who is Catholic and of the True Faith; and you, Roubillac, are engaged in work that is more or less public. Father Castelli is employed on a secret and dangerous service; and so I may not espouse the maid, either in public or in private—it is against Father Castelli's policy.' 'Well?' I answered, 'then what wouldst thou with me?' 'It is for thee to take his place. She and I must kneel at an altar; she is at heart a Catholic. To me it matters not, only that she be mated to me, in very truth or otherwise; but it must be to Mary Talbot a reality.' At first I did not comprehend the drift of what he said, and I answered, 'Let her and thou kneel at the altar of

her own Faith; take her to her father's Church.' 'That may not be,' he said. 'Listen! I have need of thee, thou of me; thou knowest what it is to love, so likewise do I. Thou knowest what it is to wait and doubt, to love and hope and fear, to have thy brain on fire, so likewise do I. Thou knowest what it is to possess that thou lovest; I would likewise, for, till now, I never knew what love is, never felt ready to barter my life for a woman's smile. And there is no other way; 'tis only for thee to assume the priest, to say a few words at the small altar in the Old Hall chapel where thou art at work, and she is mine, to stay or go, to remain in Eyam until I have won over her father, or to depart with me to Italy, the delights of which, the beauty and the music, she longeth for. But these English women are cold and coy, and want the touch of a Church to thaw their souls; and when thou hast done this slight service, thou and thine will be free of me forever; I swear it, nay, wilt thou not aid me for love of thine own, and—' Why dost thou not speak, Father Lorenzo? Friend, thou seest that I fell; that is why thou leavest me to plod over the burning share."

"I am listening to thee, my son; proceed."

"'I do but remain in Eyam until the dressing of the Wells,' continued the tempter; 'I have undertaken to decorate Clegg's Spring at the Feast of the Wells, the celebration of Ascension they call it, the festival of Flora is its rightful name; for this I stay, and 'tis for thee to make my happiness complete, and thine own!'"

Here Roubillac pushed back his gray hair from his ample forehead, and fixed his eyes upon the priest. Then, with a wild cry that was like a sob, he said, "I did it!"

"Sacrilege!" exclaimed the priest.

"I stood in Father Castelli's shoes; I spoke the blessed words of the sacrament of marriage—I laid my hands upon her head—I blessed her!"

"Thou art lost!" said the priest.

"Nay, then listen," said Roubillac, with a mocking laugh. "I am doubly damned, for this is but the beginning of my sin, but the prologue to my crime."

"Canst thou be Roubillac, the Bernardo Roubillac I knew here in Venice from boyhood?" said the priest.

"Thy prayer was impious!" exclaimed Roubillac, beating his breast. "'Tis not for mortals such as thou to dictate to God. 'Twas thou who sent us across the sea to our awful fate! Thou, priest; thou!"

"Lord have mercy upon him; he knows not what he says!"

"Nay, comfort not thyself in such hope; I know too well. Listen, priest. I will tell thee all—listen!"

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## CHAPTER FORTY-THREE

### THE FURTHER CONFESSION OF ROUBILLAC

"YES, Lorenzo, I did it, that nameless deed of profanity, of sacrilege; and more. Listen!"

continued the penitent, beads of perspiration breaking out upon his forehead. "Not alone the impiety of it to the Church, to God the Father, but to her, that innocent girl of the English village, daughter of the chief citizen, the magistrate, the titled courtier, the knight, honored by his king no doubt for some deed of valor, I, Bernardo Roubillac, painter of the altars of God, mate of that pure soul Francesca—I, the friend of thy youth—I did this thing."

And such is human nature, such the pride of country, that Lorenzo remembered at the moment that Roubillac was of Spanish origin.

"Nay, dear friend, there needs no purgatory after this life, no fiery passage to the hell that is prepared for the impious outcast. There are fiercer fires than the material flame. . . . I stood before the altar, I joined their hands, I pronounced the benediction. She thought the voice was Castelli's. 'Twas the voice of the fiend. The hand that trembled on her bended head was mine. But he had possession of me—Ziletto, the evil one, the tempter, the serpent who had beguiled the woman. She was the Gretchen of the German legend, but there was no Faust; the devil himself was her paramour, for I had no companionship in it; and yet it seemed that I did it for love, a selfish unreasoning love. . . . And so I did this woful thing; I, a layman, arrogating to myself the priestly office. In Castelli's reverend name, I, a pretender to God's ordinances, I dared to bless them. . . . She looked up into Ziletto's face,

and passed out into the night, leaning with happy faith and love upon his arm. . . . And I—'tis almost black enough for fiends to laugh at—I went to Francesca's chamber. Finding her upon her knees, I sought to kneel by her side, but fell senseless at her feet. . . . It was kindness in Him without whose permission not even a sparrow falls, to steep my soul in oblivion, until it should achieve its balance once more. The good Father Castelli, who had just returned from a journey, pitied me, and, with Francesca, ministered unto me. They ascribed my malady to overwork; for I had been much engrossed in the decoration of one of Eyam's holy wells in honor of the Ascension! . . . Didst ever confess so vile a hypocrite, Lorenzo?"

Once more he flung himself upon the couch face downward, and groaned in agony of spirit.

"I pity thee!" said the priest; "I pity thee!"

"Nay, pity me not," said Roubillac, standing up afresh and pushing back his gray hair; "'tis early to pity me. Were it not that my poor weak soul longs to meet her once again, in the sacred halls whither she has fled, and had I not promised her that I would confess to thee, perchance I would have asked naught better than to follow Ziletto to hell and meet him there, face to face, and stab him again to the death, if it might be so, and spit upon him!"

"Thou art mad, my son. I'll hear no more until thou hast calmed thy spirit with prayer. Thou speakest in a tangle, without sequence of fact or circumstance."

“Nay, thou shalt hear me to the end! I told thee he went forth into the night; she, trusting, and in good faith, leaning upon his arm. He had his will of that sweet innocent; for, with words of holy import and masquerading in the character of Castelli, I had given him the rights of a husband—I, Roubillac, the just man, who had been permitted to paint an angel of the Ascension that dominates the famous altar of San Stefano! . . . But oh, I was rightly punished; for within one short week he had returned to that baser passion from which Francesca and I had fled, and I had reason to believe that he had achieved the ruin of my wife, blasted her happiness and mine, broken the hideous bond of truce he swore to me, preyed upon her pure soul, bedabbled her immortal wings with mud—”

“Thou wrongedst her!” said the priest.

“God help me, I know it now! I did not know it then, for the demon Jealousy had me by the throat. Yet I forgave her, and in my heart disbelieved the damning thing that he put into my thoughts; for, thou seest, from vanity or hatred of my happiness, he boasted of his victory, not in words, but with subtle suggestion that filled me with misery; and thenceforward he renewed his visits to the Old Hall, professing that he came to see Father Castelli. Francesca grew unhappy, and pined for home, and there was the old look of appeal and fear in her eyes. . . . One day I missed her for many hours, and knew not whither she had strayed. Ziletto brought her home. She had missed her way, he said, in the

mazes of the Old Hall gardens, and as he said so there was the devil in his cruel eye. . . I made no vow, but I knew that I should murder him ; I knew it as by an instinct ; and I, too, smiled with the red thought burning into my life, when Ziletto's false lips curled as if with some mirthful scoffing at the mock he had made of me. But I took her by the hand, my wife that had fallen, as, God forgive me, I thought—and of all the sins of my soul and body, the greatest of all is that I doubted her, but only as one would say of some poor victim, that the fiend had bewitched her, that she knew not what she did. And yet I should have known then, as I know now, that she was as far beyond his power as the Virgin's Son Himself when the devil took Him into a high mountain and showed Him the kingdoms of the earth. But I knew it not ; I had no talismanic touch in my shriveled nature equal to such divination of her pure soul, though, God knows, I tried to be worthy of her."

The chanting of a distant choir came in through the half-open window, and Roubillac, drawing his robe about his spare figure, paced the room with head low bent, and eyes, for the first time in all that solemn time, dimmed with tears. The priest stood beside him and laid his hand upon his arm, and paced the room with sympathetic tread. He was not all priest, Lorenzo, and his heart was very human.

"Didst thou not question her?" he presently asked.

"It seemed to me there was confession in her eyes, as there was triumph in his. I loved her too deeply for aught but pity for her plight. I knew that he worked by spells. Did she not fly from him in Venice, and discover his plot unto both of us, thee and me? It came into my mind to remember that even then his influence had wellnigh prevailed. And we met, he and I; but neither the craft of Pisani the swordsman nor the justice of my cause could overthrow him. What questioning needs the dove touching the deadly fascination of the serpent? Who controverts the strength of the wolf against the lamb?"

"Nay, our Heavenly Father be thanked that thou spared her the humiliation of such questioning. How much thou wrongedst her in thought I may not say, lest I become as unworthy a priest as thou, poor mocker of the living and the dead!"

"Thou art very good to me," said Roubillac, his voice softening. "'Twas not of his own impulse that he spared her; if there is miraculous interposition, only thus could the dove escape the serpent. There was, nevertheless, the boast of the deed in his looks and in his voice, that mocked me with the same intensity of hatred that blazed in his baleful countenance when we parted at Venice, he triumphant, I groveling at his feet, disarmed, disgraced. . . Ah, dear friend, 'twas hard to bear and live; but I bore it with patience—did I not so? I became an exile that I might be free from his persecution, and Francesca un-

trameled by his devilish designs. Nay, I do not seek to justify myself. . . I slew him, without quarter, without remorse; and lest he might not know the hand that struck him, I whispered in his ear, 'Devil! 'Tis I, Roubillac. Get thee back to hell, thou fiend incarnate; 'tis Roubillac that speeds thee thither!'"

Then once more Roubillac gave way to the frenzy of passion and remorse; not remorse for the death of Ziletto, but that he should have harbored an unkind thought of Francesca. In his imagination he saw her, still alive and happy but for that fateful spell, the evil eye of the Florentine devil. Waving Lorenzo aside, he flung himself upon the floor and gnashed his teeth; then rose to his feet and reviled his Maker, and delivered himself of such impious things that the priest covered his face with his hood and groaned aloud with pitying horror.

"Peace, in the name of Our Holy Mother, and in God's name!" he exclaimed, when at last Roubillac gave momentary pause and wiped the sweat from his pale yet burning face. "Oh, Bernardo, for her sake, for thine own!"

"Nay, 'tis useless, priest!" Roubillac exclaimed, confronting Lorenzo with defiant action and flaming eyes; "thou canst not stay me! Damn him! Ten thousand curses shrivel him where he lies howling in the pit! . . . I should have dragged him to the scene of his riot and tortured him, his flesh torn with pincers! I was too gentle. 'Twas the vengeance of a poltroon, a pal-

tering with opportunity ; I did but cut the thread of his vile life, as one might still the beating of some sad heart for pity !”

As if the word pity had found an echo in some tender corner of his nature, he flung up his arms in deprecation of his rage, and turning his drawn face, wrinkled with his passion, toward the priest, he said, “ Forgive me, dear friend ; have patience. I am mad. . . . But the coward in his black heart cried aloud nevertheless ; the listening night heard his shriek, and my soul responded with delight as I fled through the darkness. . . . ’Twas thus, Lorenzo ! I knew his rendezvous. They called it ‘ My Lady’s Bower.’ I had smoothed his way thither on that night when I played the part of Father Castelli—I, the good and honest Roubillac, the famous Venetian, mark you, the noble blood of Spanish dons and Italian virtue in his unworthy veins. . . . But I was not alone in this fatal secret, as it seemed. There is no subterfuge that can blind the true lover, the devoted heart. There was a native suitor for the hand of Mary Talbot, one Reuben Clegg, a man of sober mien and earnest purpose, a student, a man of science, though, mayhap, groping in the dark ; but a man of heart and brain. Until Ziletto came he was happy in his hopes, for this woman, Mary Talbot, was beautiful and of a rare nature. . . . It was moonlight ; a moon that seemed to have secrets of her own ; a moon that shut out the world from My Lady’s Bower at intervals, as if to protect the English belle from

herself, then shone out again, with inspiring, if wavering beams. . . . All Nature might have been interested in the tragedy of that far-away corner in the world beyond the seas. There were strange stirrings in the trees, weird cries of night birds, and the fox crossed my path more than once as I crept through the woods and the bracken to the cover by the glen where I knew he must pass. And behold they came forth, down the slope from Sir George Talbot's garden, Ziletto and the woman I had fraudulently given over to him with the mock blessings of the Church."

"'Tis infamous!" groaned the priest. "What penance can atone for such profane revolt!"

"And as I stood apart, my dagger strongly gripped, vengeance in my soul," continued the penitent, his sunken eyes flashing, his lips apart, his bony hand clutching an imaginary knife," "there came upon the scene that same native, the man Clegg, and with brief parley of words he seized Ziletto by the throat; and all in a moment it came into my thoughts that he would rob me of my revenge, beguile me of the bliss I had promised myself. I stepped between them from out my hiding-place, a shadowy minister of justice, and, as the moon hid herself, I stabbed him thrice, and whispered in his ear the message I told thee of, 'Devil! 'Tis I, Roubillac. Get thee back to hell, thou fiend incarnate; 'tis Roubillac that speeds thee thither!' I hastened back again to the Old Hall and sat me down upon a seat outside the refectory, where Father Castelli sought

me. It had been the festival of the Springs, and we went in to supper; and lo and behold, the clock struck, and I noted the time, so that it might be given evidence that I was sitting there with friends and comrades at about the hour when the murder of Ziletto might have been committed; for I had become cunning too, as well as vengeful. When one falls in sin, one falls easily after the first descent. It might well be that ere the deed was well disclosed to the man Clegg and the mock wife, I was well on my way to the Old Hall. It seemed as if wings were added to my feet, and I laughed, with a fiendish joy that I might have robbed from the dead Ziletto himself. I had killed him, stabbed him to death; yet I supped with Father Castelli and some guests at the Old Hall, and talked over the happy events of the day, the glory of the time, the beauty of its emblems, the blessed ascent of the Master, and the beauty of religion."

The penitent now paused to laugh at the abject attitude of the priest.

"It was a right merry night; even Castelli unbent and joined in the toast of Eyam; and presently I retired to Francesca's chamber, and we talked of Italy until morning. I said we would go hence, if she so willed it; and she rejoiced in the happy prospect I drew for her. And I would have had her prepare at once; but on the next day the officer of the crown, or whatsoe'er they call the constable of the district, summoned me to appear before the crowner; he was to open a

court, to inquire into the death of Giovanni Ziletto, who had been murdered at a lonely spot by the vale of Middleton. I went thither with the rest, Father Castelli, and several of my compatriots; and I gave my declaration, how he and I had parted at such a time after the dancing on the Green, how he had promised to come to the Old Hall and sup, how he and I had not been on the best terms of good camaraderie, but how we had renewed and healed our differences on this day of our art competition and the festival of Ascension—all lies, my father, politic lies, for I had no desire to play the martyr for him. And I told them how, as the clock struck about the time of his death, I was talking of the success of the festival with Father Castelli. And the crowner, or king's officer, asked me if any one entertained an ill-feeling against Ziletto, any one of his countrymen; and I said No, we were a happy family, and I thereupon paid tribute to his art, to his skill as a musician, to his manliness and nobility of character, and broke down with emotion, speaking there about his death."

"Hypocrite!" said the priest.

"Ay, and worse—possessed; for the devil released from Ziletto had entered into me! . . . . And there sat in the court—'twas the room of the inn where Ziletto had been wont to charm the natives with his songs—Reuben Clegg, a witness, like unto myself, as I had thought; but 'twas not so—he was a prisoner, charged with the murder of Ziletto—charged, and on the most fatal evi-

dence. They had fought, not long before, he and Ziletto, so the prisoner had acknowledged, and Clegg was the aggressor; he said so in open court, and would not be denied. He confessed that he hated him, and believed him to be a ruffian, a seducer, a traitor to God and man, and had smote him from his path, whereupon Ziletto had drawn a knife upon him, and had accepted a challenge, and would have been willing to do battle with him to the death. But he did not murder him; none who knew him in the High Peak Hundred would doubt his word on that. The pale beautiful woman who now called herself Ziletto's wife related the particulars of the tragedy with all truth, and Clegg had naught to add thereto. The simple court of the village, knowing many other circumstances that might confirm Mary Talbot's evidence, believed her declaration and relieved Clegg of the infamy sought to be branded upon him. But the constable of Eyam and his more influential colleagues of the Hundred regarded her statement in so far as the incident of the murder was implied as mere fable; and Clegg was thereupon relegated for examination to a higher court, such perchance by comparison as our Council of Venice, and was condemned to death. My work at the Old Hall being sufficiently finished, we left the great Assize town and came to Venice."

"And without protest to stay the execution of the unhappy man? Without one word of interposition? You left him to die in his innocence?"

"I had thought to have quitted Eyam long before, but something held me; Francesca was loth to leave. She had been admitted to the house of the betrayed woman, and Mary Talbot had found comfort in her sweet companionship. For one brief moment I was prompted to take the man's place, to offer myself up to justice, but only for a moment; my heart failed me, I did not want to die. . . . And so we came back to Venice, and in its sunshine and peace and with its happy memories I tried to forget England. The wistfulness and sorrow in Francesca's eyes, I, with selfish confidence, attributed to the debt of penitence she owed me. I still believed she could not have escaped the wiles of Ziletto, but in truth 'twas my guilty secret that was killing her; she had divined the truth of the manner of Ziletto's death."

"And told thee so in words?"

"Nay, but in appeals that I should confess to thee; and in one sentence that gave her more pain to utter than to breathe, when the last message came to her. 'There is blood upon thy hands,' she said. I promised I would unburden my heart to thee; and now thou hast heard the black and damning record. . . . And she is no more, and I am alone with my sins. Not all the priests in Christendom, nor all the power of the saints on earth, alas, can raise up to life again the lovely image of pure womanhood they have carried to the tomb, Alas! alas!"

## CHAPTER FORTY-FOUR

## HIS AGONY AND AWFUL PENANCE

"IF 'twere God's will to raise up thy wife Francesca, she would, in her sweet generosity, be standing by thee in humble appeal for thy soul," said the priest, as Roubillac sank upon the couch in mental and physical collapse. "As it is, it may be that her innocence and the Mother of God's helpful aid have given her the privilege of interposition for thee at the Throne of Grace; for there is the miracle of Heaven and the miracle of earth, and great is the power of faith. But, wouldst thou dare to hope for the mercy she could win for thee, thou must first repent."

"I do repent," he said, covering his face with his hands and speaking with difficulty. "I do repent. Absolve me soon, for I feel the hand of death is upon me."

"Nay. God grant thee power to do the penance I shall hold thee to. Summon thy power of will. Arise, gird up thy loins, and make thyself worthy of forgiveness here and hereafter, thou double-dyed traitor to God and man!"

"Heap thy words of wrath upon me," groaned the penitent. "As I revealed myself unto thee, I said, 'Surely it cannot be thou, Roubillac, whose sins I am confessing.' But 'tis so, and I am damned to all eternity. Ziletto is a saint compared with the foul villain who slew him. Nay,

Lorenzo, I ask not thy pity, nor any longer thy absolution. Let me drift down the black river, alone, unpitied, a waif of the pit . . . And yet," he continued, slipping from the couch and gazing at the Calvary on the wall, "she speaks to me, I see her beckoning, there is a smile upon her heavenly face. Oh, my God, do not torture me! Slay me, let me parch of thirst in purgatory or burn in the bottomless pit, but torture me not with that lost loved face!"

"Wouldst win her back again?" said the priest, kneeling by his side. "Wouldst win thy way to the Paradise where she would have thee join her and the heavenly host?"

"Ask the pilgrim dying of thirst if he desires a cup of water; ask the man on the rack if he longs to have his body free from agony."

"By Christ's Cross, I swear to thee, Bernardo Roubillac, thy sins shall be forgiven thee if thy repentance be equal to the penance I shall ordain thee."

"Thou bringest water to the parched lips, hope to the hopeless," said Roubillac, rising to his feet. "What penance canst thou devise that human feet can accomplish, that human endurance can avail? Name it; if, as thou sayest, it shall haply insure such forgiveness as will encompass heaven and that meeting again with Francesca in sweet forgetfulness of the evil that is done, name it, Lorenzo, priest, friend, judge, name it, and let the rack, the wheel, the rope do their worst!"

"Nor wheel, nor rack, nor rope shall touch thy

body, Bernardo ; 'tis thy soul must be racked, thy spirit freed from the shackles. Listen ! Give me thy dagger !" Roubillac drew from his girdle the knife with which he had slain Ziletto.

"Is this the weapon with which thy sacrilegious hand dared anticipate the will of Heaven ?"

"His blood is still upon the blade. I have not dared part with it, though it has never been unsheathed since that night of vengeance."

"Talk of it no more as vengeance ; say that night of crime and infamy," replied the priest, holding the knife in his hand as if he grasped a crucifix. "Thou shalt depart from Venice, in the first ship that offers, and take thy way to England, landing at the port thou first didst make, and thence, on foot, without scrip or purse, make for that same village of Eyam. Thou shalt take this carnal weapon in thy hand ; it shall be thy emblem now of penitence and peace ; thy dagger shall be thy cross ; so shalt thou pass into the land of the High Peak Hundred, so shalt thou enter into the aisle of their Church that is alien to thee, so shall thy humiliation be the greater ; and, holding aloft thy cross, thou shalt confess thy crimes before all the people. Nay, thou shalt say unto them that, since God did not strike thee down by His holy altar when thou didst take His name in vain, the Holy Church thou hast profaned may yet pronounce that union inviolable. Answer me not. With all the power I have I will appeal unto the Pope himself. It may be an impiety ; God knows if it shall avail aught ; but

that is thy message to the Talbots and the people of the English village. Before them all thou shalt confess the murder of Giovanni Ziletto. Thus freeing the name of Clegg from the taint of crime. Thou shalt thereupon offer thyself to the English law and take thy punishment, even unto death. So shalt thou free thy soul from perdition ; so shall thy soul be purified and take upon itself the innocence of thy youth, and be worthy to join the heavenly throng. And thus God shall answer the celestial prayer of Francesca of Verona."

Roubillac stood forth as the priest delivered his terrible judgment, and, as the burning words fell like Fate from his lips, the penitent braced himself to the awful penance ; his frame seemed to be knitted together with a rejuvenated vigor. As the penalty was great, so did it appear as if God gave him strength to fulfill it. He thrust back his gray locks, a smile of resolute faith played about his eloquent mouth, his face shone with the impulse of a great resolve. Putting out his hand, he took the knife from the priest, and, pressing it to his lips, he raised it, priest-like, before his eyes.

"Good-by, most reverend Father in God ! May I call thee friend, Lorenzo ?" he said.

"Never better friend than now," said the priest. "Thy salvation is half accomplished. When thou standest before the people in yonder village beyond the sea, thy soul unburdened, justice done to the memory of the innocent, thou shalt see the

gates of heaven open unto thee, and there shall be joy among the saints of God !”

“Good-by, Lorenzo ! Hadst thou been Roubillac I could not have pronounced so great, so noble a penance upon thee ; but thy life has been spent with thy Maker ; to thee heaven is all in all. I tried to make my heaven on earth ; hence the long and weary road these feet must travel to find it. Nay, I do not murmur, my father, I had endured a greater penance to be assured of the future.”

“The road shall be easy to thee, Bernardo ; for, if ’tis long and weary and the end of it a pang of shame, behold, I shall be upon my knees the while, and I know that our Holy Mother will listen, that the Man of Many Sorrows will hearken to my prayer, and that God Himself will answer it, and make thy path straight, thy penance a blissful ending to a tired life. God and His saints be with thee, Bernardo !”

Roubillac knelt at the priest’s feet, and Lorenzo blessed him.

Then rising, the penitent said, “And now, Lorenzo, give me thy hand apart from the priest ; the hand of secular friendship, the hand of boyish camaraderie ; ’twill comfort me to know that I have gripped thy hand untrammelled by creed or faith or priestly vows ; ’twill strengthen me to fulfill that judgment of thy other self. Thus shall I depart blessed of priest and man.”

The priest put out his hand. Roubillac fell upon his neck. The two strong men wept as

men; and, while Rcubillac went forth on his terrible journey, Lorenzo lay prone before the Calvary, in a mighty appeal for him, body and soul.

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## CHAPTER FORTY-FIVE

### THE EVOLUTION OF THE DAGGER

Now the population of the mountain village, when the plague broke out in August, 1665, was three hundred and fifty souls. On the eleventh of October, 1666, there had died, of these, two hundred and fifty-nine. Ninety-one remained, on the brink of the shadow of the valley, waiting their several turns to be called.

The two devoted clergymen of the village had never slackened in their preaching of hope and resignation. Since the latter days of July, the rector had held his services in the open air at Cucklett; but on this Sunday afternoon, next after the eleventh of the month, in October, he had notified his flock that they would meet on the tableland around Clegg's cottage. This was in fulfillment of a promise to Mrs. Clegg. It had come into her mind that the rector needed physical as well as spiritual refreshment. She was a skillful hand at broths and possets; and she had hoped that Mary Talbot would also remain and take tea with her after the service. But Mary came early, and if you could have seen her sitting by the fire, at Mrs. Clegg's round table, that re-

flected in its polished surface a china tea set, while a copper urn sung upon the hob, you would have found it hard to realize the awful gloom that reigned half a mile away.

When Reuben Clegg entered the cottage, Mary Talbot rose somewhat formally and shook him by the hand. He had come up through the glen from the chief outpost of the cordon sanitaire, along the path which the Italian troop had traversed with the pack-horses of an early chapter in this history. He was considerably exercised by a powerful desire to accept the Faith of the Church, but his soul was still rebellious and full of doubt. The gloomy man at the outpost, ready to stop any venturesome traveler from entering the precincts of the village, had been recounting to him the tally of the dead, and the virtues of many of them and their prayers, the appeals of mothers for their little ones, the supplications of husbands for their wives, and all the bitterness of it, the unwavering, nay, the increasing numbers of the dead, notwithstanding the prayers and holy services of the Church; but Reuben's heart softened at the sight of Mary sitting with his mother, the firelight glowing in her face, that was further illuminated by a smile that gave him pleasant welcome.

Mrs. Clegg took an early opportunity to leave them alone for a while. Then Reuben said it was good for her to come, and that it cheered him to see her. She looked up into his face with a wistful inquiring gaze, and asked him if he was

more hopeful of the village than yesternight, when he was speaking with her father. Reuben only replied in a low voice that she was his hope. A stray beam of sunshine pierced the great elm that overshadowed the doorway, and flickered for a moment on the woman's face, and Reuben saw that she was not displeased.

It was a characteristic autumn day. The fading of the leaf gave a golden glory to the forest trees. The grass was green in the meadows. There were stretches of purple moorland mingling with the yellow of the bracken. A silvery mist hung over the distant hills. Otherwise the atmosphere was clear and blue, with only a diaphanous cloud here and there. The crags of the dales of Middleton and Eyam shone white in the sun.

The cottage door was open. Mrs. Clegg passed in and out occasionally, her heart full of new and joyful hope. Presently she cleared away her cups and saucers, and her servant brought out from the kitchen a small caldron, and, having swung it upon a bar that crossed the ample fire-grate, busied herself with cups and mugs on the great oak dresser. Reuben and Mary left the hearthstone and stood in the doorway, looking upon the beautiful world that was spread before them in hill, and dale, and valley, the Derwent flashing back the sunlight and the blue sky between clumps of trees, and rounding the foothills of the mountains with mirrors that reflected their misty summits.

Then there came the clergyman in his gown, and by his side the inhibited Stanley, his white beard falling over his Puritanical vestment. With them were Sir George Talbot, in his brocaded jerkin, his hat and feather, and his gemmed baldrick, and Master Longstaffe in his Sunday clothes; for he held, with Sir George, that it was good to meet the enemy with a cheerful face, counting on God's protection, to observe the Sabbath as they had always done, with their customary change of raiment. "For, an' if we have to go down, as my grandfather, the master-mariner, used to say," Longstaffe would remark, "let us go down with flying colors."

But these men were the exceptions in the village. The rest lacked neither courage nor faith, but they took on the gloom of their surroundings; and it must be said for Sir George and Longstaffe that the angel of death had passed over their dwellings. Longstaffe, who lived with his sister and an old maiden aunt, had not known an hour's illness. Sir George had lost relatives, but more or less remote in blood. It might be that Heaven had deemed the Manor House so deeply smitten with other sorrows that it had been spared the visitation of the prevailing sickness. In this Master Longstaffe and Sir George were exceptions indeed. Their fellows, and the women of the village, came in scattered groups, with their children, to the service by Clegg's cottage, the little ones clinging to their mothers' gowns or led by the hand, no less sad of face and manner than

their elders ; for even such of them as had seen Death before he appeared with his burning finger, signing his victims with a purple mark, had not seen him so grim and loathsome that they had shrunk with terror from the loving hands that had hitherto made their little lives a blessing.

And so they came, creeping up the glen or along the steep footpath from the high road to the still well-kept garden of Clegg's cottage, and gathered about the great elm ; most of them, however, keeping as far apart from the others as might be, many of them sad figures of misery, sunken-eyed, wrinkled, hollow-cheeked, weak of limb and dull of eye, but with clean linen and clothes that had been brushed in honor of the Sabbath. The deaths had decreased in the previous month, and October had come in with an almost hopeful bill of health, the grim conqueror having been content so far with only one or two victims a day. On this Sunday it was noted that two days had elapsed without a death, though not without fresh attacks. The rector was therefore justified in the emphatic words of confidence in which he expressed his belief that they had seen the worst days of the terror, that indeed God had at last hearkened to their prayers. There was one in the congregation whose heart for a moment hardened at this acknowledgment of God's tardy recognition of the hourly supplications of the people ; but he caught the angelic expression of hope in Mary Talbot's face, the almost joyful look that came into her eyes, and he put away

from him the arrogant thought, and joined in the hymn the preacher gave out. But it was a weak and mournful vocal effort that the congregation made. It came to an end with something like a sob, as, one after the other, they observed the unavailing way in which the rector tried to suppress his emotion. Those nearest the extempore pulpit, that Clegg had made for him against the cottage door, wept with him as the great tears coursed down his cheeks; for the hymn was a favorite with his wife, and he had selected it on that account, but had not been able to withstand the pathetic remembrance of her death.

It was at this unhappy moment that Mary Talbot was seen to be gazing intently into the distance. Other eyes followed the direction in which she was looking. Then, gradually, one after another, the congregation, as if glad of an excuse to turn away from the suffering minister and give him an opportunity to recover his composure, bent forward toward the glen. After a little while they saw a figure coming toward the village outpost of the cordon; a figure that appeared to all of them something more than human. It came on with an uplifted arm, and strangely attired, as it seemed, in a long trailing robe, that imagination extended into the shadow that followed it. The sun appeared to meet the figure and give it a halo. Many thought it was Christ, and fell down and worshiped. The rector saw it last, for his eyes had been dimmed with tears; and he was greatly moved. Arrived at

the post of observation, they saw the sentinel come forth and warn the stranger, raising his arms forbiddingly, but the figure came on, and now they saw that in its uplifted hand it carried a cross; and many of the people called out with a loud voice, "It is a prophet!" And Mrs. Clegg said, "It is God's messenger, to stay the plague."

When the stranger from the outer world stood before the sentinel, the guardian of the pass that led upward to the village bowed before him, and the visitor passed into the white cleft in the rocks and ascended, disappearing now and then, after the manner of the Italian procession which Clegg and his mother had watched in the happy days of Eyam. On a nearer view the visitor presented a figure of much dignity of carriage, and the cross that he raised aloft was clearly seen. And every soul of that grim congregation felt that their visitant was of God, and that a miracle was about to be performed. The sudden flush of hope in their hearts already straightened the backs of many that were bent and brought color once more to their cheeks and lips.

At last, when the stranger entered into the presence of the congregation, none of them knew him for the clean-shaven, academic, priest-like Roubillac of the Old Hall. This man wore a beard that was prematurely gray. His hair hung in a heavy mass about his face and neck. His eyes were sunken deep into their cavernous sockets. His face was long and thin; his nose bony and prominent. It might have been the counte-

nance of a hermit who had mortified his flesh; and yet his eyes were bright, and he carried himself with a certain uprightness and strength that were in marked contrast with his ascetic features. This might, however, have been only the temporary success of the supreme effort he was making to take upon himself afresh, and with physical dignity in their presence, the great burden of his sin.

"Nay, rise up," he said to many who had flung themselves upon their knees before him, regarding him as a divine being sent of God: "'tis I must kneel. I am not what ye think me."

He spoke with a foreign accent, that sounded to Mary Talbot like a baleful echo of the past.

"Your warder at the gate has told me what I had really learned among yonder hills and in the villages of the silent valleys. I know that Eyam has been smitten with the plague, and that this open glade is to-day your place of worship. I came to seek ye assembled in your church, not to bring this cross as a revelation to you, for I have knowledge that Christ is no stranger in Eyam, though, in His supreme wisdom, God has laid a heavy burden upon you; but I come with the dagger of passion and revenge as an emblem of penitence and hope."

Then they saw that the cross which he carried was a dagger reversed, the blade in his hand, the jeweled haft of it raised as a cross. And Mary Talbot now knew the voice that had joined her hands with Ziletto and blessed them. She shrank

back to the side of Reuben Clegg, who put out his arm and supported her, unconscious of the revelation of the man, but thrilling with a happiness he did not check. When she recovered from her emotion sufficiently to stand alone she still leaned upon him, and he took her hand and held it.

"I am that Bernardo Roubillac whom ye knew, he of the Old Hall, he who rewarded your hospitality with ingratitude and crime."

Sir George Talbot and the rector stood forward in amazement, and a great sigh of disappointment went up from the people.

"I am here to seek the peace which so many of your brethren have found, doing penance for the sin I committed against you and the Holy Church of which I am so unworthy a son, and from which I am an outcast until ye have heard me; and then, by the merciful grace of Him who died to save all sinners, I may hope to be taken back again into the fold, and pass away in peace. 'Twas I who, sacrilegiously taking upon myself the office of the good Father Castelli, performed the celebration of marriage between Mary Talbot and Giovanni Ziletto!"

As if the confession had broken his heart he staggered backward and was caught in the arms of Master Longstaffe. The cross fell from his hand, Sir George Talbot picked it up. But Roubillac staggered to his feet, and put out his hand for it; and Sir George gave it back to him. As he stood forward again the penitent's vest was

open, and it was seen that his breast was bare—he wore only the coarsest of raiment.

“I have but completed half the penance, which I undertook by order of Lorenzo, the friend of Father Castelli; to come unto you by sea and land, without scrip or purse, a beggar by the way, and declare my sins unto you, whom I have so grievously wronged. The hand that stretched out from the darkness, on that fatal night of the meeting of Ziletto and Clegg, was mine.”

A shudder passed through the assemblage. Reuben Clegg, loosing Mary’s hand, stepped forward with a cry of joy. Sir George laid his hand upon his arm and restrained him.

“The hand that struck Ziletto down was my hand; the voice that cursed him as he fell was my voice; yet I had the heart to sit by and see your fellow-citizen condemned to death for my crime.”

Once more Roubillac staggered back, and was held up from falling by Master Longstaffe, who, perceiving that he was like to faint, untied the remaining strings of his vest and called for water; but ere any one had stirred, Longstaffe, turning a face full of terror toward the congregation, that had by this time gathered around him and the penitent, cried, with a loud voice, “Back! He is smitten; the purple sign is upon him!”

And even as he spoke, the people drew away from him and fled, only Sir George, the rector, Clegg, his mother, and Mary Talbot remaining;

and they, Reuben Clegg alone excepted, shrank from Longstaffe and the sufferer for a moment with fear and abhorrence. Longstaffe was a brave man. He had faced the perils of infection with a stout heart, and had closed the eyes of many a dead friend and relative; but a sudden panic of fear seized him, whereupon Reuben Clegg strode forward with a firm tread, and, taking the dying man into his arms, carried him straightway into his mother's cottage.

Before the penitent gave up the ghost, Sir George Talbot and the rector took down the dying deposition of his guilt; and, as he passed away, the rector prayed over him and held the cross of hope and promise before his eyes, for, he said, "God is no respecter of persons. To Protestant and Catholic alike, to Presbyterian and Orthodox churchman, to every man who believes in Jesus Christ our Lord, the Cross is the talisman of salvation."

As he spoke there came out of heaven a cleansing wind; and from that day the plague was stayed.

When spring came again, they dressed their wells and hung their church with garlands, dedicated to their martyrs, and in the autumn they celebrated their Wake with a gentle and becoming mirth; but never again, in all the years that have passed since the advent of their Italian guests, has Eyam renewed the cheerfulness of her former state. To this day a cloud veils her beauty, and the monuments of her martyrdom

challenge the pity of the traveler and recall to the people the story of her woes. In the descendants of Reuben and Mary Clegg, however, the High Peak Hundred loses none of the pious courage that has covered the mountain village with a pathetic and undying fame.

THE END.





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